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THE WORKS OF SATAN

BY

RICHARD A. MAHER

The Hills of Desire
While Shepherds Watched
The Shepherd of the North
Gold Must Be Tried by Fire

THE WORKS OF SATAN

BY

RICHARD AUMERLE MAHER

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1921

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29475A

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Set up and electrotyped. Published July, 1921.

Press of
J. J. Little & Ives Company
New York, U. S. A.

To My Brother

ARTHUR MAHER

Dupe. Exch. E. L. Pearson 19 Oct. 1921.

THE WORKS OF SATAN

I

SATAN sat on a box labeled B T B and surveyed the world and the cornfield. He was dissatisfied with the world; and the cornfield needed hoeing.

The world, to his view, consisted of the rear elevations of a row of houses that ran east and met a row of houses that ran north—Satan and his office being set on about the bisector of the right angle.

It was early in the week, Tuesday afternoon. The *Yaleville Democrat* was all set up and ready to be locked into its cases, for printing on Friday. For the meantime, Satan had nothing to do. And he was dismally aware that unless some excitement came to the rescue he would, for very shame's cause, be obliged to hoe the corn.

"By the Great Unita States!" mourned Satan, "if I couldn't actually see that corn grow from one day to another I'd say this town was dead and buried. That corn is the only evidence of life in the horizon, and if I don't get busy soon, that, too, will begin to——"

His roving, discontented eye was caught by a movement near the junction of the two rows of buildings. The row of houses that ran east culminated in a solid brick building that filled in the corner. It was a respectable three-story building with a Potsdam red sandstone front, but, as in the case of many respectable things, a rear and private view found it somewhat unready and undressed.

A wooden stairway ran down from the third story to the ground. It gave, however, no connection with the second story. Plainly the intention had been that the stairway should go right past the second story windows without stop.

The second story windows were barred with iron bars running from top to bottom; and what was now holding Satan's eye was the moving figure of a man, who having, from the inside, removed two of the perpendicular bars, was now scrambling, with considerable weighty agility, from the window out onto the stairway.

This was a large man, fair and youngish, and yet of such evident solidity and seriousness that he was able, even at the distance and under these patently suspicious appearances, to put into his actions a certain sense of noble and compelling necessity. If, for instance, he was a thief, as seemed most likely, you felt that it must be because he had children at home.

Satan laughed delightedly as the man stood

fully revealed on the steps, looking carefully down into the rear yards of the houses at either hand.

"George G.," Satan exclaimed happily, "has just robbed himself and his own bank! And he is going away in a tuxedo and the middle of the afternoon!

"I shall not hoe the corn."

George G. Riceweather, banker, bachelor, mortgage holder, Yaleville's pride, and her principal owner, was indeed coming down from his own second story room over his own bank, but by an unconventional use of his own stairway.

"Now, would you believe it?" inquired Satan. "No, you would not," he replied simply. He was watching through the windows of his newspaper office. And, in spite of the fact that there must be other people around and about the rear windows of all those houses, it seemed that he was the only person that saw. He himself could not be seen from the stairway. Because the dirt on his window was of just that right nearness to the opaque, he could see out fairly well, while it was impossible for any one outside at any distance from the window to see in.

"No, you would not believe it," he repeated agreeably. "You'd think that that man was walking in his sleep. But he isn't. Not in *his* sleep. He's walking in this *town's* sleep. And he's not disturbing it a bit—not till *to-morrow morning!*

"Wait, Love, wait till to-morrow," hummed Satan cheerily.

George G. was warily descending the stairs, dressed, as Satan intimated, in what might have been afternoon calling dress. In Yaleville the tuxedo would serve equally well for starting for Guatemala or for calling upon a lady.

Satan watched quietly until George G. reached the ground and disappeared behind a high board division fence.

Then Satan sprang to action. He locked the newspaper type in the cases, as a preparation against fire or flood. He grabbed his straw hat and wiggled into an alpaca coat while hunting for the proper sign to hang on the door. The one he finally put into place on the outside of the door read laconically:

BACK ANY MINUTE

He did not know whether he should be gone five minutes or twenty-four hours. And he did not care a rap which. For forty years this sleepy town had been calling him Satan, in friendly derision. His great-aunt Almira had put the name upon him for some boyish mischief. And he was at last filled with a forty-years' sickness of the idea. It was the town's joke to call him Satan, because there never had been, never was, and

never would be any harm in anything he did. Well, now he would see.

They laughed when he scolded in his newspaper. They winked good-naturedly when he angrily exposed graft in high places. It was just Satan. There was no harm in Satan.

Now, "by the Great Unita States!" he was going to wake this town up to himself.

John Gibson, Petey Leonard and Saul Sartwell were sitting on the edge of the sidewalk in front of Sayles's general store. The walk was raised here so that the farmers' wives could step directly from their high buggies to the sidewalk, and the three men looked much as though they were sitting on a bridge dangling their feet in a brook.

Satan came along and asked casually:

"Where's George G.?"

"In his skin," cackled John Gibson.

"There's the bank," nodded Saul Sartwell innocently.

"Yes, the building's there," Satan admitted meditatively, and walked on.

Petey Leonard said nothing. He watched Satan. He had some time ago made up his mind that any man who would, as Satan had done, start a Democratic newspaper in a town where every man, woman and child, except himself and the Postmaster, was a rabid Republican, was worth watching.

Satan merely glanced in at the bank as he passed the corner. The green curtain on the big plate-glass window of George G.'s office was drawn down clear to the sill. But this was as it should be, for the sun beat strong across the street, and it might very well be believed that George G. was seated at his desk behind the curtain.

Satan passed the intersection of North street —the street that ran north—and kept on down the street that ran east, Main street, of course, until in front of Fairchild's Boot and Shoe Store he met Jim Smith.

"Jim," he questioned sternly, "if you were told that a man walked out of this town bareheaded in the middle of a hot afternoon, dressed like he was going to auction off the boxes at a church sociable, and headed for Ogdensburg, what would you say?"

Jim Smith stuttered a little, because he spoke very fast, and the first rush of words always jammed on him.

"Th . . . th . . . there's just two things in Ogdensburg," he shot out triumphantly, "for anybody to go to, the state insane asylum and the ferry to Canada. If he's headed for the asylum he's going to walk the twenty-five miles. Or you can make it safer. If he's goin' to walk the twenty-five miles in that rig he's damsure headed for the bughouse.

"B . . . b . . . but, if he's makin' for the ferry to Canada, he's not walkin'."

"But, I tell you he——" Satan protested.

"N . . . n . . . not by a jugful! He's got an automobile waitin' for him up about Barclay's Grove somewhere. Why, it's plain as a wart on your nose. And by now he's drivin' like the mill-tail o' damnation for Canada."

"Jim," exclaimed Satan admiringly, "you're a great man!—Where's George G.?"

Jim Smith started slightly at the sudden change of topic. But almost instantly a light of complete and wicked understanding came breaking across his face, and grew, and clarified itself until it found concrete expression in a wise and prodigious wink.

He did not wait to hear more. Perhaps he did not want to hear more. With this beginning, his imagination was master of the whole matter. Facts might only hamper him. He turned and hurried up the street.

"Jim Smith," said Satan ruminatively, as he stepped blithely on, "is a universal liar, and he probably ought to be in jail this minute.

"But, by the Poker! at least he's alive."

He walked down the street, meeting no one, until he came opposite the blacksmith shop. He crossed over and stood peering into the dim interior.

"Is George G. in here?" he hailed cheerily.

"Yes. Don't you see him?" yelled Herb Jenkins, without looking up from where he was stooping under the hind quarters of a farm horse, "I'm just nailin' this shoe onto him."

Johile Jenkins, father of Herb, stopped pulling on the lever of the bellows and his glass eye regarded Satan benignly. The other eye, however, he almost closed; but from the slit of it he watched Satan keenly. He had once prophesied of Satan that when he grew up he would be either a great man or a complete rascal. So far, Satan had discredited the prophesy, in both directions. But Johile was watching him hopefully.

Johile left the bellows and came to the door. His glass eye continued to cover Satan unwinkingly, but the other eye swept up the street with an inquiry. He saw Jim Smith stop and talk to Adelia Fairchild. That was all as should be. Jim Smith stopped and talked to everybody, on all occasions. Then Jim Smith went on.

Adelia stood still for a moment or so, in what seemed an attitude of forced resignation to all things. But that was all right. That was her usual attitude. She was a lady nearly six feet tall, but of no known proportions as to breadth or thickness. It was understood that she "suffered" from what were nebulously known as "pains." But where? or how? or why? was one of the town's enigmas. She never moved, or spoke, or did anything, except to the accompani-

ment of a sad protesting sigh, which was supposed to have reference to the "pains," but which seemed to deplore the whole useless burden of existence.

Now, while Johile looked at her, she gave a violent contortional heave at her skirts, showing a pair of lower legs that had not been seen by anybody for forty years—and whose very existence had been seriously doubted—and started to run, and did run, with amazing speed and agility, to the door of her own store, and shot in through the open door with a screech, much like a very tall and very frightened hen scooting into her coop.

"*Jee*-Rusalem Jingo!" said Johile piously, putting up a hand to shade the glass eye and peering, in honest doubt, at the door where she had disappeared. He did not believe what he had just seen. Neither could he believe that he was not still seeing it.

Before he had time to resolve the doubt, Adelia Fairchild erupted from her store, still on the dead run, and headed up the street toward the bank. Johile bent forward, his hands gripping his knees, as one is apt to do when watching a close race. But Johile's vision was not concentrated on the race, if it was a race.

Adelia Fairchild was clinging to her skirts with one hand. In her free hand she held a little

book. Johile's line of vision was fixed on that book.

Johile might be said to have a blind side—but he could spot a bank book at any distance!

Johile straightened up violently and grabbed at the region of his waist—if he had had a waist. It was the classic motion of a man tearing off his coat, going to fight. To an observer it would have seemed that he was about to assault Satan.

What he did, however, was equally startling. He wrenched his big leather apron, with a single twist, clear around a half circle of his seven-foot circumference, while he himself went half way around in the other direction. Possibly barring Adelia Fairchild's performance, this was the liveliest move Satan had ever seen in this town. Johile's upper half went around from east to west, counter clockwise, while his lower half—the leather apron—went around from west to east, clockwise. The effect being, to Satan's delighted wonder, that the leather apron practically stood still. It was just where, so far as he was concerned, it had been before. In relation to Johile, however, whereas it had before been in front of him, it was now behind him. And it stood out and down from his vast rear elevation like the slope of a squatty mountain; while Johile, his front being cleared, threw on all steam and charged up the street.

He was a short man with very broad sloping

shoulders and with a beam amidship that was truly enormous. So that the effect, from behind, as he ran up the road, was that of a darkened haystack hopping up the middle of the street.

A hen ran across the street in front of him, for a hen's immemorial reason. She squawked tragically, for no reason at all. Johile would not have stepped on her even if he could.

Billie King came by driving the Catholic priest's horse out for exercise. He saw Johile, front and rear, and the hen. The horse also saw. Billie turned to yell something, and in his excitement he dropped a rein. The horse bolted.

Satan stood turning his toes in slightly, considering—Adelia Fairchild—Johile dusting up the road fore side backmost—the hen—the Priest's horse running away. It really looked as though something was about to start.

Herb Jenkins came running to the door. He saw his father running one way, a horse running away another, a hen running a third. He jumped out into the middle of the road and waved his arms foolishly at the runaway horse. The horse went flying by with Billie King—a boy wholly without principles or virtues, but mercifully wise in the way of running horses—stealing gently out over his back to get hold of the trailing rein.

Herb Jenkins turned menacingly upon Satan.

"What the——?"

"Some attraction at the bank," Satan replied

genially. "I'm on my way down for a drink of buttermilk. Nothing like it on a hot day. Come on along."

And he walked away, cheerily ignoring Herb's profane questions.

He did go down to the butter factory. And there he found that Billie King had stopped the horse on Hildreth's hill and had now brought him down to the watering trough in front of the factory. Here, instead of letting the horse gulp water, he splashed it over his head and down over his neck and mane. Meanwhile he unfolded a tale to the two men who worked the butter factory.

It was a tale so remarkable that the two men got boldly into the Priest's new rubber tired buggy with Billie King and rode up the street. Satan walked into the now deserted butter factory—the boss had gone home to bed for the afternoon—and got his buttermilk.

But he was now beginning to feel like a fraud. He did not want buttermilk. He did not want to saunter around. He was wild to chase up the street as fast as he could leg it, to see if the town had really turned over in its sleep. But he did not dare do it, and he knew why. Because if people saw that he was in this thing, or had anything to do with it, they would merely nod their heads and say—"It's Satan"—and go promptly back to sleep.

But he thought that he might now walk up the street, pretending not to have seen or heard anything. And whether it was safe or not, he was going to do it, for he felt if he didn't get to see what was going on at the bank he would quickly burst.

He started walking cautiously, with iron restraint upon himself. He would not hurry or seem to be eager.

A horse driven to a buckboard dashed past him. A little cluttery automobile pursued. Old Phineas Whitcomb took the road just ahead of him, and quickly distanced him. Satan saw that he could spare his caution. He was a very negligible part of an excited procession. How in the world had the news—if there was any news—gotten out into the country already?

The bank, when he came to it, was crammed to the doors with a vociferous scramble of people pawing the air and each other. Adelia Fairchild, her money clutched in her hands, was fighting to get out of the bank. She seemed to fear that she would still lose the money if she did not immediately get it away from there. Ten people were fighting to get in.

Norman Farnsworth, a little round, straw colored man with a frightened cowlick standing at alert on the top of his forehead, stood neck high behind the cashier's-receiving teller's-paying teller's window, trying to wake up. He had been

dreaming just this nightmare regularly for years, usually following a late indulgence in bad coffee and doughnuts at a church sociable. But this time he did not seem to be able to shout himself awake as he generally could. Ordinarily at about this stage of the nightmare, the run on the bank resolved itself into a lynching party, and they would thrust a rope through the window and around his neck. When he felt the rope he would yell like all possessed. And his wife would reach sleepily over—she knew all about the matter—and loosen the tight button of his nightshirt. Then he would wake up, perspiring, but happy.

Adelia had burst into the middle of the drowsy afternoon, without rime, reason or excuse, screamingly demanding every penny that the bank had of her money. She had so flustered him that he had not even thought to question or argue with her. While he fumbled, and she screamed at him, the bank had literally run full of people who seemed to be poured into it through the funnel of the door. The sight alone of Johile Jenkins with his immodest leather apron was enough to unnerve him. Norman Farnsworth actually hurried, counting money *out of the bank!*

Outside the bank stood Jim Smith explaining the tragedy to all comers. Every sentence started with a sort of linguistic whirr, but once past that the words came rapping out, terrific and vivid.

"Fi . . . fi . . . fi . . . fifty thousand dollars

in the bottom of a big red car—P . . . p . . . passed through Madrid Springs at two o'clock—To . . . to . . . to . . . took every cent of the deposits—H . . . h . . . he's just five miles from Ogdensburg now—B . . . b . . . b . . . be in Canada in twenty-eight minutes!"

He had the detached, though excited, air of a man listening to and repeating bulletins from a distant scene of strife.

"But why don't they stop him? Why don't they pursue him?"

"Why don't they telegraph? Why don't they telephoam?"

"Where's the Constable? Why don't he call the police in Ogdensburg?"

"Where's Jeb Stevens?"

This last, being the first definite attempt to make somebody responsible, was immediately popular.

"He's in there tryin' to get his own money out, 'stid o' doin' of his duty!" scolded John Gibson.

This was the fact. The Constable seemed to have no thought for the fleeing George G. He was inside the bank, clawing with the others to get up to the window while the money was still being given out.

Those outside yelled and demanded that he come out, and they fought up to the door, trying to get in to drag him out. But the jam in the doorway was so complete that nobody could get

in or out. Then they yelled to Johile to throw the Constable out to them. Johile would gladly have done so. In fact, Johile would gladly have done anything. But he was by that time hand and foot incapable of doing anything. Johile was a man who, above all other things, needed fairway and space about him. He had three times been up to the window, and as many times he had been rolled back like a tilted barrel. His face was scratched. He had been trampled by women's boots. And it seemed that some one—he did not know who—was now sitting on the protuberance of his stomach.

Given three feet of cleared space about him, he would have engaged, in his present temper, to throw the Constable across the street. But he was so wedged in that he could not move. Though neither could the Constable, for the matter of that.

The situation seemed to be just about as bad as it could be. But it was not. It immediately became much worse.

Norman Farnsworth looked tearfully at the clock. It was just half past two. This thing had been in full cry now for only five minutes. He did not know how he should live through the next half hour. At three o'clock he would close the window, yes, even if they lynched him the next minute. But he could not hasten the lawful time of closing, not by one moment!

Betty Saunders sat back behind the boarded partition, puzzling over her ledger. The figures broke column and danced across the page higgledy piggledy. She did not believe that George G. had run away with the people's money, as those crazy folks out there were screaming that he had. He *could* have done it, of course, without her or Mr. Farnsworth's knowledge, but she just did not believe that he had done it. She saw Farnsworth look beseechingly at the clock. Could it be that for some reason he was really short of cash? That he might have to stop paying before the closing hour? She knew that *that* would be the fatal thing. What *could* have happened to George G.?

She took the high stool from her bookkeeping desk, climbed up back of the big safe, opened the glass door of the clock, grabbed the long hand, and—women have no respect for law, as such—turned the clock around to within a few seconds of three o'clock.

Then she slid down, hustled her stool back into place, vaulted up onto it, and waited, quivering.

The clock struck three.

Norman Farnsworth looked at the clock. Not two minutes before, he had looked and it was half past two. But he was beyond question or answer. It was the clock's business. It was now three o'clock.

He gave a final tug at his tightening collar

which already felt cordy, like a rope, slammed down his window, drew the curtain—and took a sheet of bank paper to write a codicil to his will. He was a thoughtful man.

In the redoubled pandemonium which now broke within the bank, the Constable at last rose to the high sense of his office. There was, he was convinced, no more money to be gotten out of the bank. But he was smarting from bitter injustice. He had not gotten his money. But some people had gotten theirs.

But those other people had not yet gotten out of the bank with their money. Jeb Stevens hitched his lean shoulder up high above the crowd, and from his pants he pulled a terrible looking pair of handcuffs, and rattled them in the air. And he expounded justice as follows:

"Some people has got money out, and some hain't." The clinking of the handcuffs went for punctuation.

"Now them what *has* got money out has got *some* money that belongs to them what *hain't*. The law'll have to see to it. I'm goin' to arrest——" He pushed toward the door, and, such is the mortal fear that even the sight of handcuffs arouses in the hearts of men, he was actually able to get to the doors, and through them, and shut them behind him—"I'm goin' to arrest and *re-pleevin* this bank!"

And he did.

The outer door, which was a double winged affair, had a great brass handle on either wing. The Constable snapped a bracelet of the handcuffs on each handle. Then he strightened up and jammed his hands down into his pants pockets. He glared at everybody outside, and utterly turned his back upon and disregarded both the innocent and the guilty whom he had locked in together. He was feeling, and doing his best to look, a noble figure of the outraged law supreme.

"Fine!" said Satan to himself, chuckling unseen among the crowd. "He has arrested the bank. All he's got to do now is to take it by the collar and lead it over to the lockup.

"But," he reflected, eyeing the whole scene judicially, though happily, "if something don't commence to commence here right soon, I miss my guess!"

George G. sat in the darkened parlor of Miss Dosia Farewell's house, three houses back of the bank on the street that ran north, and he fidgetted, and he swore on the family album that he was a fool for coming here. He had been here all of twenty minutes now. And he had felt like a fool when he came in, and he felt twenty times more foolish now.

He had come upon an honest errand, seeking advice and feminine counsel. He had been sitting up in his room over the bank after dinner, think-

ing things over. And as a result of the thinking he had found that he did not know what to do. He was face to face with a complicated and most difficult problem, and he did not know how to act.

It seemed to him that he was confronted with a situation in which he must have the advice of a good and worldly-wise woman. Besides these two simple qualifications in the lady whom he must consult, that she should be good and at the same time be wise in the ways of the world's evil thinkings and wrong interpretations, she must also possess a third qualification. She must be a lady who could, and did, and *would* hold her tongue. In a moment of what he now believed to have been mental unbalance, Miss Dosia Farewell had seemed to meet these exacting specifications. She was good. She was worldly wise—she owned a farm and she made money out of it, and she held some mortgages, George G. knew. Such a woman could not be a fool. Thirdly, she was a silent woman, and, being single, she would not be under that strange marital urge that impels married women to tell their husbands everything, except what the husbands really want to hear. So George G. had reasoned easily in the safe haven of his lone room over the bank.

He had thought it the simplest thing in the world to slip a couple of bars out of his window and climb down the stairs. He could thus avoid the curiosity which a daylight and unexplained

call would be sure to arouse. It had, in fact, appealed to him as a very wise and necessary proceeding.

But he had found that secrecy is in itself a committal.

The moment he had entered Miss Dosia's grape arbor and had been whisperingly ushered into her parlor, he found that he had committed, delivered, himself to the stream of adventure. He immediately began to struggle against the stream.

He announced seriously that he had come on business. Miss Dosia smiled archly. She was at once sure that the business was merely a subterfuge to get in to see her. George G. caught the smile, and gasped for air. He saw the drift of the stream.

He grabbed desperately at that most treacherous of all topics, the weather. He was sure it was going to be a very hot summer. Miss Dosia accepted this as the time-honored floundering of the bashful man—all men were bashful, she had found—and proceeded to help him delicately.

George G. began to perspire. Why had he not thought of this? What in *time* should he do? He could not very well get up and shout that he had *not* come into her grape arbor for a pleasant little flirtation. And now he honestly quailed when he thought that he had actually come here to ask this lady's discreet advice and direction—much as though she were an old wooden sign-

post—about marrying a certain young girl. And that was what he had come for!

What in blazes would he do? If he were outdoors he knew what he would do. He would *run!*

But he was not outdoors. And he did not know how to get there. The front door, he guessed, was locked. The way he had come was devious, and seemed suddenly full of pitfalls.

He would either have to blurt out the truth and take the vials of her wrath. Or he would have to go on, and afterwards sneak out of this thing the best way he could.

He chose the honest and the brave way to destruction.

While his own excitement rose within him, it seemed somehow to have communicated itself to the world outside. There seemed to be something unusual happening out in the direction of the main street. He was almost sure that he heard a scurrying of people and traffic, as though a fire bell had rung, or something. If he had been an accomplished rascal he would have listened to this, and could have made it an excuse to get to the front door at once. But he was an honest man, and he thought that what he heard was only his own guilty conscience rattling around. So he kept his seat and invited annihilation. In the midst of a heavy pause, he announced belligerently:

"The fact is, I'm getting on."

"Well, I like that!" chided Miss Dosia playfully. "Why, you're hardly any older than I am" (he was not as old, by ten years, but it can be put on the credit side of his ledger that he did not raise an eyelash) "and I'm sure you don't mean—!"

"And I want to get married," said George G., putting his foot clear through everything.

Miss Dosia got to her feet somehow, and George G. sprang up and faced her, the sound of his own foolish words banging about his ears.

For one awful instant he believed that she was going to say, "This is so sudden!"

But some merciful hesitation, of doubt, or genuine surprise, or fear, kept her speechless, while George G. caught breath to say:

"The young lady is, in a way, at least I've always regarded her so, a sort of ward of mine. And I came to you for advice."

Miss Dosia looked at him, and George G. honestly hoped that she would strike him. She did not say that she saw at last the whole dastardly scheme. But her look was plain. She did not, in fact, say anything. She just looked.

Then she marched to the front door and threw it wide open. Then she came back and stood over George G. and through her teeth she hissed at him:

"*Betty Sanders!* You bald-headed old villain!"

Now, George G. was not old, neither was he very bald, and, except that he had more money than anybody else in the town, he was not greatly a villain. But he did not stand to argue any of the three points.

He popped out into the sunshine as if he had been sprung out of a trap. And started walking toward his bank as fast, almost, as any of the people who had been hurrying thither in the last ten or fifteen minutes. He was so glad to be out, to have escaped, that he had little or no attention for the fact that there was an unusual crowd of people around the bank corner.

But when he had turned the corner and stood in the midst of the crowd, he got a view that caught his whole attention.

The crowd seemed to center about the Constable and Jim Smith. Jim Smith was holding a watch, face up in his hand, and apparently counting off the time on it.

"J . . . j . . . j . . . just stepped on the ferry to Canada!" he announced triumphantly. And, with the air of having seen a good job happily finished, he snapped the watch shut, and looked up—to see George G. standing in front of him.

Jeb Stevens was standing fidgetting by the door of the bank. The crowd seemed strangely silent. But if we remember that to everybody there—

with the exception of Satan in the offing—the sight of George G., barehead and in his well known tuxedo, ready, as it might be, for a lawn festival or a Christian Endeavor meeting, brought a distinct shock, we can understand the silence. George G. did not understand, but what interested him immediately was the strange thing, or things, draped on the handles of his front door.

"What the——?" he demanded, advancing upon the Constable.

"Heard you'd—been called away sudden," the Constable lied nimbly, "an' I just kinda locked the bank up, fer safety."

And locked a lot of people *inside!* thought George G. He was thinking very rapidly. This thing might have turned out very ugly if he had not come along on the minute. He stood stock still until the concentrated anger, gathered from his recent interview and from this thing, boiled over upon Jeb Stevens.

"Well, you *horse's tail!*" said George G. glowering. "Take that necktie off my front door, or I'll choke you with it."

As soon as the Constable had unlocked one bracelet, George G. pushed in the door. By some strange evasion of the laws of space and bodies they made way for him inside. Johile was the first object that caught his full eye.

"Johile," he said appealingly, "if you'd stand

behind that damned apron instead of in front of it, I'd think that there was *one* sensible man in this town, and I'd ask him a question or two."

"Hang Jim Smith!" said Johile Jenkins and Adelia Fairchild in duet.

George G. unlocked the glass door and walked into the sanctum where his Teller and his Bookkeeper and his money were. He thought he was beginning to understand. Jim Smith, eh?

He looked at the clock. It said ten minutes after three. He pulled out his watch. That said twenty minutes to three.

"Who set that clock ahead?" he roared. He spoke to Farnsworth, but in the same moment he seemed to know that Norman had not the brains, nor the wickedness, nor the courage, to do it.

He turned to look at Betty Saunders. For just one fleeting instant she raised her head from her ledger to look full at him, and he caught, as he had never seen it before, the shimmering glory of her sweet young beauty. There was a sort of misty, dewey freshness in her eyes—as though there were happy tears somewhere near—that made George G. suddenly wish to do something mighty.

Curiously enough, it was in that moment that Miss Dosia Farewell had her full revenge. "Bald headed—old," he recalled ruefully. He did not,

somehow, seem to care a hoot about the "villain" part of it.

He banged open the teller's window himself, and growled:

"Who's in line out there?"

But there was no rush. Most of the people, those who had gotten their money and those who had not, seemed to be going to attend a meeting outside.

From the door, Adelia Fairchild came back, laid her money down on the glass in front of George G., and began to weep copiously.

"I wouldn'ta done it, George G.! I wouldn'ta done it," she sobbed, "only——"

"Now that's all right, 'Delia. That's *all* right! Just as soon as I straighten things up here, I'm going out to attend Jim Smith's hanging."

Outside, Satan was wondering if Jim Smith's life was really in danger. Of course, he would not let them hurt old Jim. If it came to that, he would tell the truth and explain how he himself had started this whole performance.

But Jim Smith's rapid-fire tongue, oiled as it seemed for the desperate need, was doing its owner good service. The Constable had him by the collar, several others were reaching at him, and it did look as though physical violence were imminent. But he was unfolding an ever-changing tale of extenuation which was, so far, inter-

esting enough to save him from any real roughness.

Now he produced a new version of the matter. And Satan crowded nearer.

"J . . . j . . . just the other day," Satan heard him starting afresh, "George G. says to me, 'Jim, this town is so suspicious that if my bed creaks at night they think that I'm getting up to run away with their money.' So I says, 'George G., wouldn't it be a good idea just to give 'em a little scare and make 'em look foolish.' 'I think you're right, Jim,' says George G. to me. And so we fixed it up to-day, he takin' a little walk out of the village, an' I stayin' behind an' spreadin' the glad news.

"Wo . . . wo . . . worked! Didn't it work?" he demanded with a wicked grin.

Well, of all the bare-faced lying! thought Satan indignantly. He is actually saying that he put up the whole show himself!

And, what was worse, the crowd seemed to believe Jim Smith. At least until George G. should deny it; and maybe they would not ask him—they seemed willing enough to believe. And those who had not gotten into the bank at all began to put the laugh upon those who had gotten in. Then those who had gotten in, but who had not been able to get their money, began to jeer at those over-timid ones who had succeeded in drawing

their money. It looked as though there might be several private fights before all was over.

And out of it all Jim Smith was undoubtedly coming, unhurt and glorious, a hero!

Satan, who was the author of the piece, would never be heard of at all!

He walked out of the crowd in disgust.

He went straight up the street and in through the corn, to his office. He snatched the "Back Any Minute" sign off his door and kicked it into the grass.

He opened the door back with a bang, pulled off his coat, grabbed a hoe that stood in the corner, and went out and started hoeing viciously at the corn.

Half an hour later Saul Sartwell sauntered by across the neighboring lot, and inquired of the sweating Satan:

"Hoein' corn, Satan?"

"No, you fathead! I'm playing the piano with my hands crossed!"

II

"Now why did I go there? Why *did* I go there?" George G. inquired accusingly of his half-shaven face in the mirror.

"I knew better. Con*found* it, I knew better!" He pulled his nose askew and attacked the far side of his lip. "I *said,* right here in this room, I said it was a fool thing to do. *Never* go near a woman! But I did it. Just like the boy and the bee!"

Scrape, scrape, he drew the razor away from the perilous adventure of lip and corner of mouth to the broad expanse of his fat jaw, where he continued his argument more freely.

"A man," said he, in a voice that grated with scorn and disgust, "a man of sound mind, and financially solvent, to go asking a woman for advice!

"And such a question, of such a woman! Good Lord! I deserve no better than to be married right up by the first woman I meet! It was only fool's luck that she didn't accept me right then and there!

"And *then,* where would I be now!" he exclaimed brilliantly.

He contemplated this complex possibility for some time in a silence broken only by the felling of the bristles. Then:

"And what the deuce is she likely to do? Will she tell little Betty? The little girl'd laugh her head off at me. I believe she thinks I'm some kind of an old joke, as it is!

"Now what *will* Dosia say? And I thought she was an intelligent woman!"

George G. was an early riser, as became a rich man who should show a proper example. But his early rising was, of course, comparative. For a banker, he rose early. But, compared to his neighbors, who had gardens to be hoed in the early morning, or who had rheumatism, or who were just naturally cantankerous enough to *want* to get up in the morning, George G. was not an early riser.

However, when he had cleansed his face and toyed for a few dubious moments with the thinning line of hair that was falling back, nobly but hopelessly, over the horizon of the dome of his head, he went over to the American House and ate a hearty breakfast. And then it was still too early to open the bank.

It occurred to him that he ought to go up and have a look at his field of potatoes. He loved to see things growing, especially when they grew at the rate of two dollars a bushel.

The potatoes were back on a hill lot that over-

looked Satan's printing and publishing establishment.

It may very well be that George G. was this morning interested in the future of his crop of potatoes, for it was likely to be a good crop. But, it may as well be told at once, he did certainly skirt the field of potatoes rather slightingly, and he got around—on his way back—to Satan's office with a directness that was suspicious.

What his intention was in heading back to Satan's office, we shall never know. It may be that he thought of arranging for some advertising. But, in that case, would he not have waited until business hours, when he could have asked Betty Saunders to hop down from her high bookkeeping stool to her place at the typewriter and type a letter? Undoubtedly that is what he would have done, for, in spite of what Satan saw at the beginning of this book, George G. aimed to be the most correct and conventional banker in Northern New York.

It may be that he wanted to consult with Satan as to what—if anything—the *Yaleville Democrat* would print on Friday about yesterday's excitement at the bank. But, in that case, would it not have been much more conservative and solid looking to have invited Satan to the private office of the bank for an interview?

So, frankly, we do not know why George G.

was coming to Satan's office. The reader may decide this for himself. Readers have *some* rights.

We only know that George G. came to Satan's office for a purpose. And that he did not fulfill that purpose.

He came. He saw. And he—*ran!*

What he saw was this:

Satan was sitting on the box labeled B T B, one knee slung high over the other to the neighborhood of his left ear. He had a stone slab on his lap which he was using for a writing desk. His tongue was stuck desperately in his cheek, and he was writing furiously. Beside him sat Dosia Farewell, talking furiously.

The door was open. But, as has been intimated, George G. did not enter. George G. ran. He ran without shame and without apology, back to his potato field.

"The most depraved man that ever lived!" said Miss Dosia, in continuation of what she had been saying for the last half hour. She had been at the door waiting for Satan when he came from home. "I've lived here all my born days, and so did my father, and nobody ever heard of such a thing! He ought to be strung up! I'll see him behind prison chains if it takes every dollar I have! Pretending that he'd run away with the bank, when all the time he was playing fast and loose with the affections of a respected female!

"I knew there was rascality in his eye all

the time he was proposing to me. I thought he was ashamed of himself, as he should have been. But he wasn't! He hadn't the least thought of being ashamed. He was thinking of Betty Saunders! Oh, the tarnished villain!

"And that poor little unprotected more than orphan! Satan, you know in your heart her mother's been dead ever since she was three years old. And only the Lord knows when or where her father died, I'm sure I don't! And to think that that bald-headed old rascal should talk of marrying her to my face!

"But I won't permit it! I tell you, Satan, if he can do as he likes with all you men, because he's got the money, he can't do as he likes with me. I'll see him in jail first! I'm not afraid of his money.

"Don't argue with me, Satan. Don't excite me! I tell you I won't rest till I see him peeking through bars. *Don't* contradict me!"

Satan was still writing furiously. The first glance at the group would have led one to believe that Satan was writing from the lady's dictation; that he was taking down her words verbatim, to be printed in the paper just as they came from her lips. Undoubtedly this is the conclusion to which George G. jumped, and then he ran away.

But a little reflection would have reminded one that if this were the case, then Satan must be

a very rapid stenographer. Then again, a little further study of the situation would have revealed the fact that Satan was not listening to the lady at all. If what *he* was writing had anything to do with what *she* was saying, it was quite by accident. He had not heard a word for the last fifteen minutes. Also, as a further proof that Satan was not a mere amanuensis, we have the fact that she was now speaking to Satan, himself. In which case, it was obviously unnecessary for him to write the words down.

No. Satan was not taking dictation. Satan was in the throes of authorship.

The story, which by now had been told to him four or five times, had taken a grip on him at the first telling. He had scarcely heard any of the later versions, which was just as well.

It had come forcibly to Satan that George G. had made history among lovers. Nero might or might not have fiddled while Rome burned. But George G. had done as well, or better.

George G. had made love *during a run on his bank*—and to the wrong lady!

Satan was sure that it was a most unusual love situation. And he struck in to write it while it was yet hot in his imagination.

"And now, Satan, what are you going to do about it?"

The question seemed to annoy Satan in some vague way, for he scowled fiercely and hitched his

right knee up a little nearer to his left ear. But he kept on writing.

In the last few minutes Miss Dosia's attention had been veering gradually from the rascally, but absent, George G. to the unresponsive Satan, present.

He was writing feverishly. And she could suppose that he was writing down every word just as she said it.

But when she came to where she asked him a plain question, she saw no reason why he should write that down.

Besides, she didn't want him to write down what she was saying now.

Her full attention, and a part of her anger, fell on Satan.

"Why don't you stop? Why don't you answer me? What are you writing, anyway?"

"Writing a novel," Satan answered without interfering in any way with the business in hand.

"Oh, you vile man! To put me in a scandalous book! My poor innocent life blasted by the breath of your wicked pen!"

While she spoke the lady suddenly towered over Satan.

"You incarnate *villain!*" she screamed. "You're in league with *him!* He to come and insult me in my own house! And you to write a book about it! A *novel!*

"I'll *novel* you!"

And she grabbed Satan by the humped shoulders, and shook him violently.

Now Satan was a mild-mannered little man who, up to yesterday, had lived a blameless life. He had nearly all his life been called Satan, mostly in derision, because people thought it was funny to call such an inoffensive little boy and little man by such a bad name.

He did not now resist or resent the shaking. He seemed concerned only for the safety of his story, which he had been writing on the backs of some loose auction posters. If Miss Dosia had grabbed for that, probably Satan would have fought. But the lady was not in those moments sensible enough to know that she ought, above all things, to secure the manuscript.

So Satan merely untwined his thin legs, swept the manuscript safely from the slab to his pocket, and let the slab drop flat between his extended feet.

It was a big, thin slab of stone, and it fell flat on the floor with a whack that would have been startling at any time.

As it was, Miss Dosia's nerves were in a very bad state from sleeplessness and continued irritation, and until she had gotten out of the door and was a good twenty yards away from the building she was convinced that she was shot dead.

Until this day she believes that Satan fired a gun, to frighten her at the very least.

And as she fled across the open lots towards her own back door, she ran full into the Constable who was taking a morning look around at the rear of George G.'s bank.

Miss Dosia had not before thought of appealing to this branch of the criminal law. But she now felt that her life had been threatened.

"Jeb Stevens," she panted, "I've been shot—at! I want you to arrest a man. Go in front of me. He might shoot again!"

"Wha's that, Doshy? Wha's that? Who's been ashootin' of ye?"

"Satan!"

"Satan? Shootin'?" The Constable shook his head. The idea of Satan doing anything so out of the way was unthinkable.

But his very inertia seemed to give back to Miss Dosia the courage that had for the moment been frightened out of her.

She took him by the arm and pulled him about.

"You turn right 'round"—she had already turned him around—"and march right up to Satan's door"—she gave the order after she had already started pushing him on the way—"and arrest Satan. I've been shot. And I've been lamfooned in a book! I want him arrested."

Nearing Satan's door, Mr. Stevens began to resist.

"But I tell ye, Doshy," he protested, falling back on the intricacies of the law, "it can't be did. Y'ain't got no warrant!"

"He didn't need any warrant to shoot me, and I don't need any warrant to have him arrested, either. Are you going to do your duty?"

Thus adjured, and propelled, the Constable went forward to Satan's door, which was now shut, and, as it proved, locked.

He knocked, first tentatively, then loudly; while Miss Dosia explained through the door:

"It won't do you any good to lock yourself in, Satan. You'll be locked up soon enough! Open the door. Here's the Constable come for you."

"Musta gone away," said the Constable, who was probably voicing his secret hope. He was, of course, just a little curious to know what had happened. But he preferred peace at all times. And he knew that if Miss Dosia came upon Satan now, he would have to do something.

There was no response, but Miss Dosia did not believe that Satan had fled. She slipped around to the one window of Satan's establishment and, pulling the wings of her sunbonnet up against the glass, like a man taking a picture, she peered in. Then she called the Constable:

"Come here instantly, Jeb Stevens, and catch the villain in the act!"

"Shootin'?" inquired the Constable, as he came gingerly around the side of the building.

"No. Writing. There he sits," she pointed, "there's your prisoner, sitting writing scandal libel in a book about me!"

The Constable came and stooped and cupped his hands above his eyes and looked in.

It was as Miss Dosia had said. Satan sat on the box labelled BTB, right knee pointing to left ear, writing rapidly.

The Constable called cheerily:

"Hey, Satan, open the door. What you been adoin' to Doshy?"

But Satan apparently heard nothing at his window, and Miss Dosia could not stand it.

"Satan," she threatened, "if you don't open the door and let the Law in, I'll break this window!"

Satan gave no sign. And Miss Dosia, who was always infuriated by passive resistance, stooped for a stone.

Here the Constable interfered forcibly.

"No, no, Doshy, don't you go doin' no breakin' an' enterin'. You'll get into the arms o' the law, too." He took the stone from her lifted hand.

It is always difficult to say just when a crowd begins to gather. But at about this point the strange behavior of Miss Dosia and the Constable began to attract people.

The first spectator to reach the scene was Billie

King. This was natural, because every action of the Constable was a matter of live interest to Billie King. The Constable had threatened him with arrest and durance nearly every day since he was six years old.

He was quickly followed by others—boys, men and women, who came inquiring, were enlightened by Miss Dosia as to what was proceeding, and were allowed by the Constable to approach one by one and peer into the window.

Jim Smith came early, and stayed as a sort of second chorus, supplementary to Miss Dosia.

He took up his office as soon as he had acquired the few facts that he thought necessary.

"B . . . be . . . *been* sittin' there all night, writin' like a trained flea!" Jim Smith announced severely.

"M . . . mu . . . *made* black coffee for himself three times in the night!

"Di . . . did . . . did . . . *didn't* eat a thing since yesterday noon!

"Rr . . . rrrrrr . . . *writ*in' the great story of how George G. started a run on his own bank so's to have a chance to get in and make love to two women at once, one present, an' one by proxy!" He triumphantly wound up his long speech and took breath.

"There he sits, and pays no attention if the whole world was here!" said Miss Dosia.

"Go . . . go . . . goin' to be published every week in the *Yaleville Democrat,*" said Jim Smith.

"He cares not for what I am to suffer! He is a monster, a cruel villain!" Miss Dosia denounced.

"Hi . . . hic . . . hic . . . *he's* got thirty thousand words done now, finish Friday, nine-thirty A. M.," Jim Smith promised.

George G., being a young banker—he was a lawyer, too, for the matter of that—who had an established reputation for sound sense and conservatism, should have known enough to avoid crowds and sensation of whatever sort. He should not have dignified the hubbub about the printing office by the weight of his important presence. And, as all the world now knew, he should have been ashamed to show his face there anyhow.

Why did he go? Why did he not go straight from his potato field to his bank and sit down there for rumor to come to him, as a banker should?

Well, the fact is, George G. was a stoutish young man, thirty-three years old, who found himself in love for the first time. Which means that he did not know what he was doing.

He went fatuously down, for the second time that morning, to the neighborhood of Satan's office, because he saw the crowd and thought that he could find out what was going on without being noticed.

He had no idea as to what turn affairs had taken. But he should have known better in any case.

Miss Dosia spied him instantly and drew him into the vortex of things.

"Come here, George G. Come here and see what your evil deeds have brought on! Look at him! Go on up to the window and see him in the act!"

George G. had no choice. It was against his will. But he found himself moving up to the window. Miss Dosia was in command. He could not run away. He could not stand still and defy her.

"Go on up," she said, "and see yourself in a book, a libel book, a *scandal* book!"

"Book?" George G. argued. "How in a book?"

"Satan's book. Satan's *own* book!"

George G. was sure that some one had gone crazy. On any other day he would have said that the whole town had gone crazy, rather than admit that he himself was dull of comprehension. But this morning George G. was not himself. He allowed himself to be forced up to the window, to look at, he knew not what.

"You'll see it all in the book," said Miss Dosia.

"How could he have a book published overnight?" argued George G.

"Ss . . . sss . . . sssss . . . *sittin'* right there all through the night!"

"Danged lie!" said George G., glowering steadily through the glass. "He hasn't been there half an hour."

He saw just what the others had seen. Satan sat there curled up on the box, writing busily.

To George G. it seemed that Satan was the only person in the town who had business, and was attending to it. George G. thought he would like to talk to him.

"Say, Satan," he inquired hopefully, "what's going on here?"

"Oh, you can't come round him talking to him nice that way," said Miss Dosia. "He's got you in the book. You can't soft-soap him that way. He'll publish you!"

"Ff . . . fu . . . fu . . . *forty* thousand words now," said Jim Smith. "Used up two pencils, and only scratched his head once, 'long about quarter past three," he added, to complete the record.

But Satan answered nothing. He wrote on steadily, his lean little body cramped up into all sorts of impossible knots. He made no flourishes. He was not posing. He was honestly and excitedly absorbed in what was, to him at least, a great thing.

George G., in spite of himself, in spite of the fact that he knew that Jim Smith was lying and that the whole business looked like a hoax, George G. was impressed, and he began to be worried.

"Bub . . . bu . . . bub . . . *book*'ll be half finished at four o'clock. No alterations," Jim Smith announced.

"Oh, *shut* up!" roared George G.

And here began his ultimate downfall. He lost his temper and his tongue got out of control.

"Pack of confounded idiots!" he yelled, at half the population of Yaleville. "Why don't you go home and go to work? Look at the blasted town out here making a fool of themselves at eight o'clock in the morning!

"What in *Tunket!*" he shouted brilliantly. "Didn't you get enough of it yesterday!"

Some folks were inclined to be frightened, for, though they had heard George G. speak sharply before, they had never known him to get excited or to lose his head like this.

He should not have mentioned "yesterday." Somebody thought of the spectacle of the Constable handcuffing George G.'s front door, and laughed.

That laugh opened people's minds. They knew that *they* were not making fools of themselves today. Perhaps they had been a trifle over-timid and credulous yesterday. But it was *George G.* who was making a spectacle of himself to-day.

Perhaps George G. knew this, too; but, for the reason that we have noted above, he was not himself, and he did not care.

For the first time, at least since his childhood, George G. was being openly laughed at and jeered in the town which he owned. And he did not care.

"Old folks have no more sense than the young!" mourned George G.

And the old folks merely grinned delightedly. George G. had struck a snag this time. And the young folks jeered.

"You can't come any of your come-overs that way, George G.!" said Miss Dosia exultingly. "You've caboodled everybody, every way, everywhere. *But you're in the book now!*"

"Kraw . . . kr . . . kra . . . *crosses* his legs the other way every hour," said Jim Smith, still announcing the original attraction.

"Shot off that sputter!" said George G. brutally to Jim Smith. "If you can't *talk,* why don't you *choke?*

"You know well enough that Satan hasn't been there a half an hour," he continued, to his friends and neighbors in general; "and yet you stand there and let Jim Smith lie down your throats—*and you seem to like it!* Of all the dunder-headed lot of people. You haven't any sense! You haven't got any brains! You don't *know* anything! You never *will* know anything. I've a good notion to sell out and get right out of town!" he threatened. And he started stamping his way out of the crowd as though he intended leaving town at once, and on foot.

The boys and girls set up a little cheer, or a jeer—no one could have told which—just for the sake of the noise. And George G. went away.

But George G. was not in a hurry to leave town. As he said to himself, walking across the open lots to reach the main street, he did not care if Satan wrote a book about him. Neither did he care what Satan might write about Miss Dosia.

He cared for nothing now but to meet Betty Saunders, before she could see any of this crowd, before she could hear anything of all this—and ask her to marry him.

He had come far since yesterday afternoon, when he had sat down in his room after dinner, to think of this very thing.

Then it had seemed that the proposal was a thing of the airy future, a thing to be thought of well, and considered from every point of view, in the way in which a banker's plan should be formed.

First he would think of every conceivable objection to his marrying Betty Saunders. He would meet each of the objections with a clear financier's logic, and he should show that they were not objections at all. He would meet *all* objections. He would even listen to objections from other people, just to show how little there was in these possible objections. He would go to Miss Dosia and listen to her objections, and demolish them.

At last we know why he did go to Miss Dosia's.

But the proposal itself was not intended to materialize for a long time. No man should go into such a condition without duly counting the difficulties, especially, so George G. had argued, no man with his large acquirements and undertakings in life. No. It was to be all a deliberate, well-planned campaign, ending in a well-tasted success. Above all, there must be no hurry.

And here was George G. in the morning, rushing across the lots, to meet Betty Saunders and head her off from everybody—— And pellmell to propose to her.

He seemed to be sure that if he just could get speech with her before any one could tell her of the doings of Satan, he could prevail with her. On the other hand, he quailed, if she first got word of his own doings of yesterday and of what Satan and Miss Dosia were at this morning, she would laugh in his face.

He saw her as she came past the cedars on High street on the other side of the river.

He stopped as he came opposite the end of the bridge, and stood hesitating. He knew what he would like to do. And he knew that it was the only safe thing to do, if only he dared. He knew that he ought to walk right out to the middle of the bridge and meet her, and ask her to forgive

him for getting himself into such a mess, and tell her he was sorry, and ask her to marry him.

For a moment he believed that he would do just that. If he was going to be published in a book anyway, well then, he might as well make love in the middle of the bridge, where everybody from the four points of the compass could see everything.

But he did not dare.

He walked slowly along toward the bank, eagerly watching the sweet young figure now stepping daintily upon the bridge. She seemed to be alone in the glory of the morning. And George G. suddenly realized that the blue of the sky above the cedars, the glistening beauty of the morning, the sweet breeze coming up from the chasm of the river, were all for her. He had seen her grow from childhood to womanhood. She had worked for four years in his office. Yet he was now aware that he had never before even seen her.

Fool! and Idiot! he called himself, thinking of the blunder he had made yesterday, and that it might cost him the loss of her. If he could have but this one chance, he promised that he would never again be a fool.

If she could but cross the bridge—she was half way across now, and his heart began to rise —and if she could reach the bank without being spoken to by any one, he would never again be

blind. He would tell her the whole truth. And —well, he could only try—it might be that she would not laugh at him.

He walked up to the door of the bank and tried it almost guiltily, to see whether Norman Farnsworth had come yet.

The door was locked! George G.'s hand shook with gladness as he rattled his big key in the lock. It seemed that fortune was willing to be good to him. The coast was clear!

He hurried through into his own office, and stood at the big front window where he could watch Betty again.

She was across the bridge now, and coming down the other side of the street. She would keep on down that side until she came directly opposite the door of the bank. Then she would cross, and walk straight into the bank. George G. had often wondered why she did that, instead of crossing above and coming down the sidewalk —there was no walk on the other side of the street, only a dirt path. But George G. was very glad now that she had formed that habit, for even in the short piece of sidewalk there was a chance that some one might have come out and stopped her to talk.

Just then George G. heard a horse and wagon coming banging down the street, and he shivered. He knew it was silly. Surely a horse and wagon could be driven down the street without

telling the girl anything! Nevertheless, he shivered.

It was Billie King, driving a milk wagon for somebody who had wanted to remain near Satan's window. Billie King never walked.

From the noise, one could have thought that the wagon would go clattering safely down the street. But Billie King was a careful driver. There was a crosswalk of rather loose flags in front of the bank. George G. had had the stones put there for the crossing of the street in bad weather. Now he wished that he had had them dropped in the bottom of the river.

Billie King pulled up, to soften the bump at the crossing. Betty Saunders came to the crossing at that moment, and stood waiting for the wagon to pass. The horse stopped, thinking naturally that he was being pulled up for a roadside colloquy.

If George G. could have gone through the big plate glass window, he would have done so. And he would have jumped out into the street and grabbed the whip, and he would have given that horse such a cut that he would not have stopped running at the butter factory. But he could not go through the plate glass. And he stood rooted, helpless, where he was, by the knowledge that everything would be told before he could get around through the bank and out of the door.

"Hear about George G.?" inquired Billie King, cheerfully confidential, and loud.

George G. heard no more. There was a singing of blood in his ears and a roar of murder in his heart that would have shut out any external voice.

Also, it may be that Billie King remembered that he was in front of George G.'s bank, and that he lowered his tone.

But George G. did not need to hear. He knew, just as well as if he heard every word, that Billie King was telling how George G. had gone and proposed to Miss Dosia and that then he had turned right around and told her to her face that it was Betty Saunders that he was going to marry; and that Satan could be seen at this moment writing the whole matter down in a book.

George G. could not see the girl. He had, perhaps, a faint hope that she would turn angry and tell Billie King to go on about his business, and that she would then come in and storm at him and scold him roundly for making a laughing stock of her. If she would do *that!* If she would *only* do that! George G. would bless her forever! And he might somehow be forgiven. Anything, *anything at all,* if only she would not *laugh!"*

And he might not have to kill Billie King, after all.

He could not see Betty. The wagon hid her.

The first thing that he heard from her was a delicious, mocking, happy laugh.

It pealed out in the street, and trilled in to him in the merriest notes of pure fun. Never had George G. heard a girl's laugh so merry and so winsomely delightful in merriment.

George G. listened and looked, until he saw Billie King's face split wide open and he saw him double up on the seat, convulsed with the infection of the girl's happy laughing.

Then George G. threw his hands up about his head and ran out through the bank and up his private stairway to his own room.

There he sat down heavily on the bed and buried his face in his hands.

Through his hands he spoke, in a voice that might have come from a dishonored grave.

He said:

"A fool there was!"

George G. thought that his remark was original.

III

JIM SMITH once said that Satan's office building originally came to town as the box covering a pair of Grant Allen's shoes. This probably was not altogether true. It was not true at all, except that it was an undeniable fact that Grant Allen's feet were large, and that Satan's office considered as a public building was rather small. Nevertheless, it was his castle.

He sat through the whole of Wednesday morning apparently oblivious of the public clamor outside his window. From George G. and Miss Dosia and the Constable down to the raggedest small boy in the village Satan defied all; and pursued his inspiration across the flat slab on his knee.

At about eleven o'clock Uncle Dempster Wright, Satan's great uncle on the father's side, drove up to the door, and, finding that "halloing" brought no results, he got down from his buggy and came and beat upon the door with the butt of his whip.

Satan did not answer, not even when Uncle Dempster shouted who he was. Satan knew that his Uncle Dempster was a simple man, who might

easily be used by designing persons, to open an entry to the office.

But when Uncle Dempster had stated, in so many words, that he had come on business of his own, and that he had on his person three dollars to pay subscriptions to the *Yaleville Democrat,* Satan was obliged to listen. No amount of coaching would have enabled Uncle Dempster to lie so extensively and circumstantially. He must be telling the truth, Satan concluded.

He opened the door just enough for Uncle Dempster, who was a very tall, thin man, to squeeze in.

Miss Dosia was also very tall and very thin, and she was right behind Uncle Dempster.

She had spent the morning at Satan's window, except for five minutes when she had gone home to feed her chickens. And she was now maudlin with anxiety to know what it was that Satan was actually writing.

Satan saw the dark shadow behind Uncle Dempster's shoulder, and he did not quite know what he should do. For in his heart he was afraid of Miss Dosia, as he was of every woman. He feared that she would insert her foot between the door and the jamb, so that he would not be able to close the door. He wondered whether he would have the courage to give her foot just a

little kick—not to hurt her, but just enough to make her take the foot away.

He was a desperate man. He had all this morning been treading the fields of high romance. And he did not now propose to have his ears boxed in the presence of his Uncle Dempster, as might very possibly happen.

But Miss Dosia was a desperate woman. She did not insert her foot in the door. She put her *hand* in, before Uncle Dempster was quite through the door.

Satan suddenly saw the hand, inside, gripping the jamb of the door, and he believed that he was lost. He could not slam the door upon a lady's fingers. All was lost! Now he would certainly be manhandled by a woman, and before his Uncle Dempster.

It is hard to say what made Satan do it. It may have been the fascination of fear. It may have been the courage of desperation. Or it may have been just an accidental outcropping of natural depravity. However, Satan did it.

He reached up and took the fingers from the door jamb; took them, not roughly, but gently, persuasively, tenderly.

Slowly the surprised, disbelieving fingers yielded to the soft persuasion.

Satan brought the hand down gently to a more convenient level. Then, very gently, he persuaded the hand out away from the door, and gave it a

firm, unmistakable, tender squeeze. And then, as gently, he dropped the hand.

Satan closed the door.

Miss Dosia stood on the step a moment, blushing. She took up the hand that had been squeezed, and held it tenderly in the other hand, and looked at it. Then she gathered up her skirts daintily and set tripping off towards home, without looking back at the scene of late strife.

Miss Dosia was going home to sit in her grape arbor, and pillow her head upon her hand, and dream.

"She's after you, Satan!" warned Uncle Dempster.

"Why, not at all!" said Satan, hurrying back to his box and manuscript. "She's after George G."

"George G. ain't *here,*" the old man retorted.

"No. But I'll tell you, Uncle Demp, I'm writing something here about her and George G., and she wants to see it."

"Mighty risky business, Satan. Don't go mixin' up with no women folks. I been married three times an' I *know!*"

"But I haven't anything to do with it," Satan defended. "Writing is my business."

"An' gettin' herself a husband is a woman's business. An' that woman was here on *business.* I know the look in their eyes. What you writin'?"

"Oh, it's just something that happened here

yesterday in this town. I'd show it to you, but it's only scribbled here. It won't be fit to read over until I get the proofs ready." He meant the long strips of galley proofs, the first samples of the printing, for each column of his newspaper.

But Uncle Dempster did not understand.

"I don't like to see you goin' to prove nothin' about no woman. She'll *prove* you!"

Satan was again busy with his manuscript.

"Seems to me you're gettin' mighty wound up in this thing. Was a time when you wouldn't snicker at fifty cents for an advertisement. Now you can't bother with three dollars in new subscriptions."

Satan sprang up immediately.

"Uncle Demp, you're right! Anybody that goes out of his way to bring me three new subscriptions deserves the very best here. But I'll tell you now, I've been having a very busy morning and I'm all nerved up." He got out his subscription book, and took the three dollars.

"All comes o' messin' round with womenkind, always gittin' of ye into a stew!"

"But I tell you, Uncle Demp, I had absolutely nothing to do with this at all," Satan cleared himself resolutely. "Why, I was away down at the factory getting a drink of buttermilk, when the whole thing happened! I didn't know a thing

about it until she came here this morning to tell me about it. I couldn't do less than to write the thing down."

"All right! All right! Go right on along the way you're headed. You know your own way. But don't forget I told you. I warned you!"

"But, Jimminy Cricketts! Uncle Dempster, what of it! What about it? Dosia's a good woman. And she wouldn't marry me at all. She's got money and I haven't. Why, she'd be more likely to marry *you!*"

"No, Sir! No, Sir! *No, Sir!*" the old man shouted as though Satan were dragging him to the preacher. "Marriage is an Act o' God, an' a contrivance o' women. Any man that wouldn't fight his way through wildcats to get away from it, it's because he hain't got the spunk of a louse. Why you, Satan, if it once came your way, you'd have no more gumption than to lay right down in the path and let it come right to you!"

"Well, what did *you* do, Uncle Demp?"

"Me? *Me?* I fit like a ring-tailed snorter for sixty years! Fightin' didn't do no good, but I fit just the same. Oh, they didn't have no picnic with me!"

"Well, you could fight again," said Satan cheerily.

"No, Sir! No, Sir! It's an Act o' God. Like a cloudburst, or the measles—Nobody can help it

when it comes. But it's the contrivin' o' women just the same. An' a man's got to be ready to fight all the time."

"Well, on your own showing, Uncle Demp, you're about the highest trained man living. You ought to fight again. Let me make a little paragraph of it."

Satan flourished his pencil and began to dash off lines in the most approved, rapid fire, stage style, pretending to read before he had really written anything:

"HE FOUGHT THREE WARS! HE WILL FIGHT AGAIN."

"That's just for a little headline," he explained. "Now for——"

"Stop your tarnation impudence, Satan!" Uncle Dempster banged the floor with his whip and stamped the two steps necessary to take him to the door. "Open this door and let me out o' your pigeon coop. An' I'll tell you now, Satan, it's easy seein' your Aunt Almira's gone. You wouldn't be cuttin' none o' these jinks. You've got too much ground under you. That's what's the matter with you! Gittin' proofs about women, eh? Aunt Almira would've put a stop to that in two jerks of a lamb's tail. All right! You'll see where you wind up! That Doshy woman or some one or tother'll have you in no time!"

"Don't let anybody in, Uncle Demp; I can't be disturbed to-day."

"Too much ground under you, altogether too much!" remarked the old man as the door closed after him.

Jim Smith was sitting in the buggy, ready to ride away with Uncle Dempster.

This was an unprecedented piece of impudence, for Jim Smith was a person with whom nobody would be seen consorting, except, perhaps, Satan, who had no reputation, or George G., who was rich enough to do as he pleased.

But Jim Smith was enjoying himself in these days and he was not afraid of a glowering eye or a want of welcome.

In going away Miss Dosia had taken most of the interest with her. And Jim Smith was too good a showman to waste his efforts upon a heedless and dwindling audience. Then, too, Uncle Dempster might have seen something of what Satan was writing, and it might be a help to Jim Smith. Though in his heart Jim Smith did not believe that Satan's work would amount to much. He would be too much bound by the confines of truth. This, to Jim Smith's mind, was fatal to art.

Thirdly, it was just possible that Uncle Dempster could be induced to stop at the American House. He was a professing Christian and a teetotaler by precept, but he was old enough to

have certain exemptions in these stirring times. At least Jim Smith believed that it might be worth trying.

"Ss . . . Ssss . . . Ssss . . . *Satan* show you the book?" inquired Jim Smith.

Uncle Dempster had not intended to answer any questions to Jim Smith. But while the latter was stuttering, Uncle Dempster became so interested in trying to help him to say what he was trying to say that he forgot this caution. He forgot that it was dangerous to make *any* statement to Jim Smith, and he answered:

"Nope. Said he didn't have the proofs ready yet."

"Mmm . . . Mu . . . Makin' pictures of it, eh!"

" 'S that what he meant? Now I want to know!" exclaimed Uncle Dempster, surprised and interested. "I Swan! I didn't know what he was talkin' about!"

"Pu . . . pu . . . pu . . . Pppppp . . . Pictures," stated Jim Smith. "Most likely, *movin'* pictures. Satan's a clever man. His father was a terrible clever man."

This allusion was patently ingratiating. For the world knew that Satan's father, the Reverend Dempster Wright of the Union Parsonage of thirty years ago, had been as the pupil of Uncle Dempster's eye. That Jim Smith should praise him now when he had been dead these many

years seemed to prove that Jim Smith was not as bad as people said. The allusion was so plainly made to please Uncle Dempster that it was hardly worthy of Jim Smith's talents. But the case was urgent. He had spent a morning talking thirstily, and they would soon be passing the hotel.

Uncle Dempster did not answer. But he looked milder under the softening of reminiscence. Jim Smith thought it time to begin.

"Pl . . . Pl . . . *Please* let me out at the American House, Mr. Wright. Some money owin' to me there. I got to go in and collect it. I suppose you don't know Mr. Bartlett?"—Uncle Dempster lived several miles out of the village on the Massena road, and he was supposed to disapprove of all things connected with the hectic life of town. But he answered:

"Knew Joe Bartlett 'fore he had pants."

Mr. Bartlett, hearing his own name, came out on the porch of his hotel and, when he saw who was in the buggy, came down the steps to give old fashioned welcome.

"Well, *Dempster Wright!* Of all good and great men! Don't know *when* I saw you before!

"Step down, Mr. Wright! Step right down and let me put in your horse. I know Ann Clarke" (Mr. Bartlett's wife, whom he called always by her maiden name) "won't let you go away from here without a lunch. But, come in and see me in my department first."

Thus Jim Smith was not only allowed to enter the hotel—where he was not always welcome, for he was notoriously not a cash customer—but he entered with the freedom of the house, as a member of an honored party.

Now the reason for this hearty welcome to Uncle Dempster may perhaps be explained.

Yesterday the whole village, and as much of the countryside as could get the word, had rallied to George G.'s bank. This morning Satan's office had drawn a crowd. On the dismal other hand, Mr. Bartlett could scarcely remember when his hotel had drawn a crowd.

With the coming, however, of Satan's rich and only relative, in the company of Jim Smith, Mr. Bartlett began to hope that his hotel was about to regain its proper importance as the center and gathering place of the news and doings of the town.

At twelve o'clock Satan was reported to have gone home to his dinner. (He was at this time keeping bachelor's hall in the one-time Union Parsonage which he had bought, for reasons of sentiment, from the moribund Union Church.)

At one o'clock he was observed to come back from his dinner.

The next report was that Satan had closed his door and battened up the keyhole, and that he had drawn a heavy curtain over his window, so that nobody could see a thing that he was doing.

Jim Smith was by this time fluent, tongue-free, and full of wonderful information.

"Movin' pictures," he explained. "He . . . *He's* just finished makin' five hundred feet of reel —that's pictures wound up on a spool—and he's in the dark room now developin'. Uncle Demp saw the proofs."

"He was just goin' to show 'em to me," Uncle Dempster admitted, with what he thought was a rigid adherence to truth. He seemed to know that there was a weak spot somewhere in these rapid operations through which Satan was going, under the hands of Jim Smith. But he was too comfortable, and too well treated, to bother much about it.

Jim Smith headed a small committee to go to Satan's office and verify the latest bulletin. He led John Gibson and Martin Dickey twice around the building, which looked rather like a deserted packing case in the midst of the corn, and proved to them that they could see nothing inside. This seemed to establish and clinch the dark-room hypothesis.

"H . . . h . . . h . . . h . . . h . . . hear the reel goin'?" said Jim Smith, cupping his hand up to his ear.

John Gibson stuck his hand up behind his ear, and admitted:

"Seems like I *do* hear a buzzin' and a hummin'."

"Itha . . . Itha . . . *That's it!*" agreed Jim Smith. "He's runnin' the reel through the solution."

The others knew no more about motion pictures than did Jim Smith. He knew nothing. So he was practically free to prove anything he wished.

There had been during the winter a moving picture "show" down in the vacant store opposite Johile's blacksmith shop. But the operator had gone away in disgust in the summer, for the people would not go indoors on nice evenings, to see anything whatever.

And then, when you remember that our summer twilight in the North Country stays until ten o'clock, there is really no place for the movies.

So, the ignorance of Jim Smith's committee need not be surprising.

He started to lead them away. But he went back alone, as though to make doubly sure. There was a peephole which his sharp eye had seen, just around the corner from where they were.

He turned the corner, and glued his eye to the crack. A little light came into the place from Satan's improvised ventilator overhead, and he had a fair view of the interior.

Jim Smith grinned.

There was Satan seated on the box labeled B T B, his feet thrown high upon his desk, his body and head pillowed comfortably and securely

into the corner of the building on an old leather cushion.

Satan was snoring complacently. On his bald spot, to protect him from the flies, he wore a white handkerchief, which gave a very good effect of a nightcap. So that he was, for all practical purposes, in bed.

Jim Smith led his committee back to the hotel and when he and his fellows had reported in full, he contrived to get Uncle Dempster off into a quiet corner, and began:

"D . . . D . . . Demp, old boy, there's a fortune in it for us! Satan's pictures'll draw crowds from all over the county. All we need is just a little capital—You'd never miss it—to get that store down the street fixed up. I can get the lease of it this afternoon for ten dollars. We'll make money hand over fist! I'm just seven seventy-eight short. Let me have seven dollars and seventy-eight cents now, right this minute, and we'll turn it back seven hundred! Why, say! I can——"

Uncle Dempster had not resented the familiarity. He was in a mild and gracious mood. But, the moment he understood the full and ultimate meaning of the thing, that Jim Smith was *trying to get money from him!* Uncle Dempster rose from the corner in his wrath.

"All a condummed *trap!*" he exclaimed bitterly. "There ain't no pictures at all! And as

for movin' pictures I don't believe there's no such thing, *nowhere!*"

He would accept no apologies from the Landlord. It did not even mollify him when the latter offered to throw Jim Smith out of the place. Uncle Dempster had been threatened in his most tender part, and he would not be appeased.

He stumped out on the porch, and down the steps, yelling loudly until he got his horse, and then he drove away in a towering rage.

It would seem that Uncle Dempster's outbreak should have destroyed faith in Jim Smith's statements and forecasts. But it did nothing of the kind. So great is the power of mere repetition, that within half an hour after Uncle Dempster's departure he was forgotten, and the whole village had been authoritatively informed that Satan had made, and would no doubt soon show, a complete moving picture of the events of yesterday.

Johile heard the news, and he remembered the incident of the hen crossing his path as he ran up the road. He was not sure whether or not he had kicked the hen. Perhaps he had. *If* he had, and the picture showed it, then Johile foresaw complications.

The hen belonged to Grant Allen. Now, if one of Grant Allen's hens should refuse to lay during the rest of the summer—and the picture showed Johile kicking a hen—then he, Johile, would probably be sued for damages.

Miss Dosia heard the news. It aroused her from a very pleasant, half-waking day dream, in the course of which she was the mistress of the manse in which Satan lived, and had already refurnished it.

The news did not please Miss Dosia. She remembered how she had smiled at George G. If the picture showed that—and it *would:* she remembered that she had seen ladies, vampires they called them, smiling thus to men's doom in the pictures—what would Satan think of it? It was certain that it was Satan who squeezed her hand. He must have meant *something.* And Satan was not at all an unpleasant man to think of. He was said to be very easy-going, too easy-going in fact. But Miss Dosia did not feel that she would have any great objection to that.

She wished that he would not show these pictures. Surely there must be some way of stopping him. She must find some way.

George G. heard the news. He was busy at his desk, and his door opening out to the rear of the cashier's cage was open.

Hoddy Blair came to the cashier's cage with the news. He was a big, barrel-bodied man, with a great square flat face, a lisp, and the general expression of a weak-minded cow.

He was one of George G.'s pet hates.

"Nithe day," he remarked through the window to Norman Farnsworth. Norman was busy with

a pass book. He did not look up. He did not admit that it was a nice day. He admitted nothing. He merely kept on the look he always wore at the window. It was a look of stern neutrality, which said, as plainly as if he had stuck up the sign:

"The bank is not responsible."

It might be a nice day. But the bank could not even appear to endorse anybody's suggestion on anything, without proper security.

"Hear the newthe?" inquired Mr. Blair cheerfully. He did not expect any answer.

Norman Farnsworth had not heard the news. But he expected the worst. And he expected that it concerned George G. Because George G. had been going from bad to worse ever since yesterday in the middle of the afternoon. He wished that George G.'s door was shut, so that he could hear this thing through with a clear conscience.

"They've got George G. in the movieth," Hoddy Blair proceeded equably. He had not expected that his news would be received with any great enthusiasm.

"Thatanth got a full life picture of all what happened. Even George G. takin' it eighty mile an hour in the automobile for the ferry to Canada."

"He never went," said Norman Farnsworth.

"All in the movieth," stated Mr. Blair.

Then Norman Farnsworth slipped out of his

cage and went over and very softly closed George G.'s door.

George G. had begun to listen at the mention of Satan's name. He wanted to know what new extravagance Satan was supposed to be at.

But Norman Farnsworth closed the door, and George G. would not open it to listen—probably they wouldn't let him hear anything anyway.

So George G., finding that he was to be the subject of a funny moving picture, but unable to get any further particulars, sat there and gritted his teeth, and wondered if he would not do better to have Satan and Jim Smith arrested at once and bound over to keep the peace. But, he reflected, Miss Dosia would have to be bound over also. And that could not be done. There was no law in the land to make Miss Dosia cease from troubling.

When he realized that he was being laughed at and mocked to his face here in his own town, which he owned, and that he could not do a thing either to prevent it or to punish it, he grew angry, and he got up and began to pace the floor and to swear violently.

He said:

"Confound the whole confounded, blasting thing to blazes, anyway! What the devil's got into Satan lately, at all? I know Satan's at the bottom of it all. He's got all the brains there is in the town anyhow. But he's got to leave me

alone. Confound him, I'll have his hide! I'll go up to the manse to-night and show him where be belongs. Make a monkey outa me, will he!

"Confounded deuce of a note!" he broke out again, reverting to profanity. "Here I am cooped up in my own room! And I don't even dare to stick my ear out to hear what those two old grannies are buzzing about! I'm afraid they'll laugh at me! Think of it! *Me!* Hanged if I'll stand for it! I'll wring Satan's neck!"

He found Satan that evening rather upset and nervous, as it seemed. But that was to be expected. Satan ought to be nervous, said George G. to himself, after all this rumpus he's stirred up.

Satan met him at the door, and almost refused to let him in. This, in itself, was a confession of guilt. For Satan's was the one house in the town to which any one might go at any time of the day or night and be sure of welcome and entertainment. Outside of office hours, he was always at home, and the world and their wives might come into or go out of his house without scandal or offense.

But he held George G. at the door.

"Satan, this thing's got to stop," said George G., looking over Satan's shoulder into the lighted dining room.

"Meaning just what, George G.?" inquired Satan. And he, too, turned to look back into the dining room.

George G., being accustomed to have his own way in his own town, seized the opportunity to push past Satan into the room. And he sat down in Satan's own chair, right under Satan's own reading lamp.

Satan's volume of the speeches of David B. Hill lay open on the table.

David B. Hill is still piously hated by all good Republicans of rural New York. Consequently Satan, in dull times, used to print a favorite speech of David B. Hill in the *Yaleville Democrat*.

It made everybody in town mad, except Satan and the Postmaster.

George G. slapped the book shut.

Satan was coming back, rather reluctantly it seemed, from the door. He was evidently worried. He seemed to be waiting for something, or listening. He must be thinking up some new deviltry, thought George G.

"Sit down, Satan," George G. commanded.

Satan sat down on the very edge of a chair that was standing at the corner of the table. In a vague sort of way, it occurred to George G. that some one else must have just left that chair in that position. But he had no time to speculate on this. His mind was too full of his own business.

"I want to know, Satan," he began, "just how, and why, you started this infernal racket. If you

wanted to get into a fight, why didn't you run for office, or organize a club; and leave me alone. What did you want to start on me for?"

"Start, nothing! You started it yourself."

"I started it!" roared George G. "*I* started it? Why, I was calling on a lady, in the middle of the afternoon, when the whole confounded town was set nutty, by you, or by somebody just like you."

"*I* didn't pull the bars out of the windows and start down the rear fire escape like a fly-by-night. You can't do that sort of thing around a bank," Satan advised severely. "People don't like it."

"How could I know the woman was such a fool?" complained George G., dragging in matter that had nothing to do with Satan's contention.

"Dosia is nobody's fool," said Satan sententiously. "You should have gone to her front door, in the cool of the evening, and proposed to her like a man."

"Confound all the confounded messes that ever were heard of!" shouted George G., bouncing out of his chair. "Why in Sam Hill should I propose to her?"

"Preservation of the species," said Satan.

"Confound the ding-batted species altogether anyway!" shouted George G. wildly. And then he began to prance about the floor.

"And you, Satan, what in *time*'s got into you The idea of you and Dosia cutting up like this at

your age! I tell you I won't stand it, being made a fool of for the show of the town! You sitting up in your window writing a book about me! And Dosia and Jim Smith running a peepshow outside! That's a pretty kettle o' fish for me, a man with my position in this town!

"Why don't you talk? Why don't you *say* something? You sit there on the edge of that chair like a hen on a hot griddle—And what are you turning your head to the parlor for? Are you laughing up your sleeve at me?"

George G. circled round the table, walking rapidly, until he came to the open door of the parlor. There he stood a moment glowering into the darkness of the front room.

It did not occur to him that there was any one in the parlor. But Satan's behavior was puzzling and maddening him. A silent Satan was one that nobody could understand. For Satan was a happy little man, with a ready tongue, and a busy interest in all things. "He must have been doing some meanness in this," thought George G., "or he wouldn't shut up on me this way."

He stamped away from the parlor door, and advanced upon Satan.

"Out with it, Satan! Out with it, I say. Who and what started you at the confounded blasted business anyway?"

"I didn't want to hoe the corn," answered Satan weakly.

The answer was a half truth. But George G. did not know that. He thought it was a random lie. And Satan's whole behavior was so unlike him, so dishonest, in fact, that George G. knew there was something wrong. Satan was hiding something, or somebody.

"What!" roared George G., leaping out into lurid profanity. "What in the dumdam name of Adam's horned toad! has hoeing corn got to do with making a butt out of me! I don't believe a dang word of it! You wouldn't hoe the corn anyway. No! There was somebody else at the bottom of this. Was it that harridan, Dosia?"

"Sh—sh now, George G., you know that's no way to talk."

"It was!" bellowed George G. "I *knew* it was, all along. And the worst of it is that I can't do a thing!" George G. was now mad past all reason, and his talk was foolish. "I can't do a *thing!* I've got to just stand and grin and pretend that it's funny, and she can do what she likes! Why that confounded old Jezebel——"

"Now look here, George G.," Satan interrupted with a warning hand, "you can't say anything about Dosia in my house. Dosia's my friend, and a very fine lady."

A shaking, panting cry of triumph broke out of the dark parlor, rooting George G. to his tracks, and making Satan look as though he would like to climb up on top of the table.

Behind the shriek came Miss Dosia, charging out of the parlor and straight at the two men!

Naturally, George G. thought that she was coming to assault and batter him.

But it was at Satan that she flung herself.

"I don't *care!* Satan," she cried. "You *did* stick up for me! And it's the first time in years that a man's done anything but snicker at me. I don't care! I'm going to kiss you, anyway!"

George G., who was not a very bright young man at best, stood hopping from one foot to the other, and yelling, and thinking it was the best thing he had ever seen.

Satan did not exactly run away. But he was a nimble little man, and he ducked and side-stepped and kept away pretty well.

"Go it, Dosia!" George G. was yelling. "I'm going to write a book myself! Stand your ground, Satan! I'm going to call it, 'Dosia's Pursuit of the Male!' "

This, for some reason, made Satan mad. He did not like it.

He pushed Miss Dosia aside gently, and stepped up to the Banker.

"George G.," he said, politely but firmly, "you-go-to-hell."

Then he turned swiftly on Miss Dosia.

"Now then, Dosia!" he barked.

Miss Dosia stood paralyzed. There was a light of fire and conquest in the little man's eye

that made her quiver. She felt that she was going to be seized and *hugged* in his arms! He seemed to have suddenly shot up until he towered fearfully over her.

She saw him take one long step toward her. And Miss Dosia turned in fear, and fled!

She scooted into the dark parlor and got behind a chair.

George G. was standing near the door. He still had his hat in his hand.

He felt, somehow, like a boy who has stubbed his toe.

He reached his hand back for the doorknob, opened the door, and backed out on the porch without a word.

He walked down the street in a kind of haze. He did not know just what had happened. He remembered only that Satan, in some way, had been fine.

Then, right in front of Stewart Woodard's gate posts, the fog lifted from his mind, and he felt violently happy in relief.

At first, he did not know just why he was so happy. But it soon came to him. He had suddenly remembered that he would never again be troubled by Miss Dosia. Satan, he believed, would probably occupy her waking and her sleeping thoughts for the rest of her life.

As he realized this perfect solution of his

troubles, George G. was looking at one of the Woodard gate posts.

It was a square post with a big round ball on top.

George G. took off his wide, expensive straw hat and set it carefully and critically on the head of the post.

George G. stood in front, struck an attitude, and addressed the bonnetted post solemnly, as follows:

"Samuel Johnson Wright, known as Satan by foolish people, you are a brave man!

"If I had *your* nerve, and *my* size, and *my* money!

"Say——!"

IV

GEORGE G. took his hat off the gate post and put it firmly on his head with both hands. If he had intended to go home and go to bed—as he should have done—it was now plain that he was going to do nothing of the kind. When he had taken off his hat to apostrophize the gate post it had seemed that for him the evening was at an end.

Now when he set his hat solidly back on his head, it was evident that he was going to seek further adventure.

It was not late, of course. Away from the artificial light it was hardly dark yet. Down the street ahead of him Sayles's store, the Bank, and Delia Fairchild's store, all on one side of the street, gave out yellow lights that made the night look black behind them.

But on the river side, where there were no lamps, it was still twilight.

George G. could see the bodies of the trees on the other side of the river, where they stood out against the dulled orange of the low sky. Particularly he could see two enormous pine trees that stood on a rise above the high river bank

and showed black as two great cones of pitch against the light, and he was all of a sudden convinced that a girl was at that moment lying in a hammock between those two pines, and that she was thinking of him.

It may have been the lesson in bravery which he had just taken from Satan, or it may have been the feeling that he was relieved from the troubling of Miss Dosia. For George G. was man enough to be very honestly bothered by the thought of hurting poor Dosia. Or it may have been just the general optimism of a redolent summer evening. Whatever it was, George G. felt vastly encouraged to go and ask Betty Saunders to marry him forthwith.

He crossed the street and walked along the river bank, keeping away from the lights of the stores, and stepped gayly out upon the bridge.

He had put every doubt behind him, and he was now tasting the glorious wine of anticipated triumph. Though he had no more reason for hope this evening than he had had this afternoon, or this morning, yet he now marched to meet fate with all the assurance of a man who will not be denied.

He did not meet any one on the bridge. But on the hill going up to High street he was recognized. Charley Whipple saw him in the dusk and raised his hand respectfully. George G. held the mortgage on Whipple's farm.

"Evenin', George G.," he shouted. "Out for a walk?"

"Yes," agreed George G. heartily, "out for a walk." And he kept on jauntily up the hill.

"Another fool question!" said George G. to himself. "Did he think I was out for a ride?"

But it did not disturb George G.'s happy and promising mood. There was a sweet little girl awaiting him just ahead there beneath the pines.

He had by this time decided that they would be married at once.

Yesterday, only yesterday at noon, he had been all for deliberation, for wise consideration, for advice and counsel with his neighbors. But see what that had brought him to! And yesterday noon seemed long ago, now. He had been through a world of harrowing experiences since then. Anyway, he was for action now.

It did not now seem to be a difficulty that Betty was years younger than he. "She's twenty-one," thought George G. "If she can vote, she's old enough to know her own mind." (He forgot that plenty of people have been voting for forty years and don't know their own minds yet.)

He was not troubled now by the thought that Betty had worked for him for four years. In his callow youth—about fifty-six hours ago—he had thought that he ought to be careful about marrying a girl who had worked for him. People might

not want to give her the respect due his wife when they remembered that she had worked for him. He had even planned that he would pay her wages privately and let her stay at home for a year before they should be married, so that people might get used to the idea of Betty being a lady.

Now, George G., seasoned by two crowded days of happenings, decided that he had neither time nor patience for this quibble. It was all poppycock, anyway, he reasoned. His wife would be his wife. No more, no less; the lady and the joint owner of the town.

Nor did the circumstance of Betty's unprotected childhood and girlhood matter now to George G.

There had been a time when he thought it a serious thing that the girl's father had never been seen in Yaleville. Now he did not care who or what Betty's father had been. It did not matter. George G. and George G.'s position, and George G.'s money would make up for all that.

He was not exactly thinking these things as he turned off High street and up the lane that led to the pines. They had once been questions in his mind, but now they had settled themselves without argument. George G. knew that he was right. And he hurried up the lane.

As he approached the pines he heard singing. It was not loud, uproarious singing, or he would

have heard it a long way off. Neither was it of the low, sad, soft, forget-me-not variety. It was just singing, like *any* singing.

It was a duet, so George G. gathered.

"Sing to me but with thine eyes!" sang the voice of a young man who sat on the grass beside the hammock.

"Guard my bald head from the flies!" sang the voice of a young woman who, according to George G., was twenty-one and knew her own mind.

George G. might have heard more. But he did not like the silly summer sound of the song. And, too, it occurred to him that the subject of baldness was being mentioned in his presence rather frequently of late.

To put the matter bluntly, George G. was not delighted with the situation that awaited him; but he decided that the situation should await him no longer.

He came pounding up the lane and in among the trees toward the hammock.

In the very midst of an impassioned appeal to some one to sing to him only ocularly, a tall young man leaped to his feet to face the invader.

But he only whistled:

"Gee! It's George G.!"

And the tall young man subsided up against one of the pines.

He was an observant young man. He had

asked Betty Saunders straight questions, and had received foolish answers, as he thought. And he was curious now to see what would happen. He had just asked a question about George G., and Betty had started singing. The young man had considered this a very foolish answer.

Now he stood in the dark against the tree, declaring to himself that he should see what he should see.

There was a violent, alarming upheaval in the hammock. The first thing that the observant young man was sure of was that Betty Saunders was running away in the direction of the corner of the house.

The next thing that the young man observed was that George G. took up the chase, snorting indignantly, but running like a good fellow.

For a moment, it seemed that the young man himself would join the pursuit. But an observation came to him, and he voiced it to the unconcerned evening.

"She can't get into the house on that side," he commented, on what he had just seen. "Then what did she go 'round that side for?"

"She wanted him to ketch her!" he answered himself bitterly.

Then he put his hat on his head and walked away down the lane, very straight and stiff.

George G. ran across the lawn and around the corner, heedless equally of having his eyes put

out by the low-hanging branches and of breaking his neck over possible croquet wickets.

He was indignant, and angry. And he was pleasurably excited.

When he got around the corner of the house, he remembered the same fact which had come to the young man's mind.

Betty could not get into the house from this side. But George G. did not stop to draw any conclusions from this fact. He just ran harder, to catch her before she could get around to the other side, where she *could* get into the house.

"She's going into the summer house!" exulted George G., as he rounded the corner.

The summer house was a thing of four posts and a slab roof, but it was deeply covered from the ground to the peak of its roof with heavy scarlet runner vines.

George G.'s father had built it for Betty's mother, that summer when she came home to get well. George G. was a boy of twelve that summer when he had seen the strange lady in the summer house with Betty, a baby of less than a year old, in her arms. It had been Betty's playhouse from the time when she had learned to play.

"If she goes in there!" whispered George G. to the rising beating of his heart. "If she goes in there!"

But she did not go in there.

The summer house stood under the guard of a

big butternut tree. Betty ran straight as if for the door of the summer house, but when George G. was about sure that she must be going into the summer house, he saw her dark figure slip through the opening between the vines of the summer house and the bole of the tree.

"Aha!" said George G. "Thinks she's fooling me!" (She *had* fooled him completely. But let that pass.)

And he dashed hotly into the breach between the summer house and the butternut tree.

Probably Betty had not thought of it. But it is possible that she did. It was as easy for her to slip through the opening as it had been ten years before. For George G., however, it was another matter. He went through, of course, because he was angry and in love, both. But he lost two buttons from his vest and he bruised his shoulder badly.

He shook himself and started running again. Betty had passed beyond the back of the house, and he could see her running out toward the back of the orchard. If she had wished to escape into the house, she had now passed her opportunity to do so. And George G. now believed that she had done this on purpose.

"Will she dare jump the fence before my eyes?" wondered George G. indignantly.

"Well, by the Jumpin' Jimminy! I can jump a fence, too!"

But Betty did not put him to the test. She turned sharply to the left, and George G. almost ran full tilt into the fence.

Before he could recover and straighten out his course again, Betty was over in the other corner of the long, narrow orchard. The course on that side was straight, but George G. knew that it was not clear. The branches hung low on that side, because the trees were not pruned. And only Betty knew the ins and outs of the way.

George G. knew that he was being dared, and he felt somewhat as he might have felt if he had been chasing a kitten—except that the kitten could not have laughed at him.

But he could not turn back now. All that he could do was to thank heaven that it was dark, so that the town could not see its first citizen making a fool of himself, and keep on after Betty.

"Thinks I'm going to run into every corner and out again after her!" grunted George G. "Well, I'm not!" And he struck out a bold diagonal across the orchard, with the very sound plan of heading Betty off against the fence.

A heavy, low-sprawling Duchess of Oldenburg apple tree was all that now separated him from the goal of his endeavors. He lowered his head and plunged boldly in toward the fence. He came bursting through the trailing branches triumphantly, with his hat, miraculously, still on his head, and spread his arms for Betty.

"Ha!" said George G., breathing victory.

"Hmph!" said Betty, dodging under his arm and scooting past along the fence.

George G. made no further comment for the moment. He was too angry and too hurried for speech. He started stamping after Betty.

He seemed to have gotten the idea that he was going faster by stamping the ground harder.

Now Betty knew that she must *run*. She was not afraid of George G.'s anger. She was afraid of himself. And she did run. But George G. was too strong and swift for her. For, in spite of the fact that the town made him out variously as a demi-god and as a plutocratic scoundrel, he was just a good big muscular fellow hardly beyond the flush of youth.

Betty heard the thunder of his boots on the hard earth in her tracks, she felt the hot breath of a pursuing man behind her. She knew that she could not go much further. She was afraid to go on, to tease and anger him further. She was afraid to stop, to surrender.

She felt his great heavy hand reaching at her from the dark behind. And she thought it was the end of her run. But just as his fingers touched her flying hair, Betty saw something rising up, dark and barely discernible, in the path right under her feet. She leaped desperately, and cleared it, and sped on.

George G. did not see the thing in his path.

Nevertheless, it continued to rise, so that when George G. ran full into it, the thing was standing nearly to the height of his knees.

George G. and the dark thing fell, and rolled together.

George G. arose, spitting dirt and breathing fire.

He felt that he had been led into dastardly ambush.

"What the——? What the——?"

"Why!" said a voice from among the sheltering branches of a near-by tree, "it's *Angela O'Toole!*"

"Angela *Oh——!*" roared George G.

"Why, yes, one of my chums at the Villa Marie——"

"It's a confounded *calf!*" shouted George G. And he made a kick at Angela.

"Ma-a-aa!" said Angela.

"Coward!" said Betty.

George G. dropped the affair with the calf.

He sprang after Betty so sharply that had he not been impeded a little by the low branches of the tree under which she stood he would surely have caught her.

As it was, Betty took her instant of grace, shot through the branches, out on the other side of the tree, and ran for dear life right across the orchard to the summer house again.

This time she *did* go in; George G. knew she

did. And he rejoiced wildly as he ran. Now he would never let her go!

The summer house was as dark as any pocket in a proverb, but George G. charged in with no thought of further ambush. He was sure that Betty had surrendered.

His momentum carried him straight to the vines at the farther side, and he grabbed a double armfull of them hopefully. But there was no Betty in them.

He threw the vines from him with a swish, and came back to the door. He had to be cautious, he remembered. She might slip out behind him.

He started warily from the door, moving around the leafy wall of the summer house, groping with both hands. He went half way around, and came back to the door. Then he started feeling around the other half of the circle.

Then he saw that this strategy was unsound. He was now ready to believe that Betty was capable of moving to one side of the wall while he was religiously searching the other side. Strange, how Betty, who was as dependable as a ledger in the bank, should be so unreliable in the dark!

But now he thought of a new plan that was infallible.

George G., although he did not seem tall, was nearly six feet in height, with arms proportionately long.

He stooped low so that he was sure that nobody could run under his arms. And he began to sweep the summer house like a hand going around the face of the clock.

He stationed one hand at what he judged to be the geographical center of the place, and began to describe the circle of the summer house, making himself one arm of a compass, with his left hand as the pivot.

Slowly, with infinite guile, he crept around the circle he was describing, never pausing, but groping and covering everything, so that a rabbit could scarcely have escaped him.

And yet, when he came around the circle to the door again his arms were still empty. Betty had eluded him. She had come in here. He was sure of that. And he had not left the door unguarded an instant. It was very strange.

But George G. was not yet at the end of his resources.

"I'll show you, yet, Lady!" he promised. And he struck a match.

He held the match above his head and stared around at the vines.

He stood staring until the match went out in his hand.

"She isn't here!" said George G. He did not wish to believe it. He could not believe it. But he admitted that he could not produce her.

"If I ever *do* catch her!" exclaimed George G.

But there was an uncertain note in his voice, showing that he had lost some of his early confidence in the chase.

"If I ever do catch her, I'll——"

He went out and walked around the summer house, glowering at it all the way 'round, but saying nothing. The walls, so far as he could see, were solid masses of vines; in fact, he never did find out how Betty got out of the summer house. But she was gone, as though she had vanished through the roof, and now George G. thought he was alone.

He stood at the summer house door and swore violently:

"Confound the whole confounded thing to blazes anyway! Pretty caper! Falling over calves and all! What in the name of the horned moon am I doing anyway, chasing a little girl around trees in the dark! Why didn't I go home and go to bed! Why couldn't I ask her in the morning! I don't have to do a dog trot around the bank to get a word with her!

"George G. Riceweather," he summed up solemnly, "if the people of this town knew what a fool you'd made of yourself yesterday and tonight, they'd take their money out of your bank so quick that——"

He stopped short, and hopped off the step of the summer house.

He had heard, or he thought he had heard, a giggle, from a near-by tree.

It was the stunted pear tree that stood by the summer house, opposite the butternut tree. George G. had passed directly under the pear tree when, a moment ago, he had walked around the summer house.

He advanced upon the tree, pointing a stern finger in the dark.

"Come down out of that tree, Betty, or I'll call the Justice of the Peace this minute."

For a little time it was doubtful whether there was anybody in the tree to answer him. He could not see. But finally Betty took up the argument:

"You couldn't have me arrested for climbing a tree."

"I don't want to arrest you. I want to marry you!"

"Oh!"

" 'Oh'? What does that mean, 'Oh'?"

Silence from the tree.

"Dye mean to say that you didn't know what I was chasing you for! Don't you know? What did you think I was chasing you for?"

"I thought it was the heat, maybe."

"Braaa——!" roared George G., as nearly as it can be spelled. "Did you ever see me chase any other woman? *Did* I ever chase any other woman? Well, then, you might have known that I wasn't chasing you for nothing!"

"But, yesterday, you wanted to marry Miss Dosia. And I'm sure you didn't chase her."

"She wouldn't run."

"But you wanted to marry——"

"I wanted nothing of the kind!" George G. stamped his foot. "I went there to ask her advice about marrying you!"

"And what advice did she give you?"

"Told me I was a bald-headed old villain," said George G. with a groan.

"And was that what made you propose to her?"

"I never did!" yelled George G. "I never said a word to her. She made up the whole thing herself."

"Men are so untruthful!" sighed Betty.

"Come down out of that tree."

Betty did not stir.

"Come down and let me talk to you. Who could ever talk to a woman up a tree?"

"What about?"

"Now, Betty, you know well enough what about. The whole blasted town knows what it's about—Thanks to my jig-pated foolishness! And *you* know all about it, too. You've heard a lot more than I wish you had. I wish you hadn't heard so much," he said dolefully.

It was a sort of muffled appeal to Betty, to say that she had not heard anything. Or that she had heard *something*. Or to say anything—*any-*

thing, at all, rather than to sit up there in that tree in the dark, and perhaps laugh at him. George G. did not know, but he supposed it quite likely that she was laughing at him.

He felt that he was in no position—or rather that Betty was hopelessly out of position—for sentimental talk.

To a lady in the moon, or in the stars, or in a hammock, he could have talked of his heart. But to a lady kicking her heels in a stunted pear tree, what could you?

In this extremity, with a lady so placed, it seemed to George G. that nothing but the soundest common sense would do. And to George G. common sense meant money.

So, with consummate foolishness, he began to talk about money.

"Golly! Betty," he argued, "it isn't as if I was offering you something crazy. You couldn't make a mistake in marrying me. You sit and sing songs with young Willie Hope"—this was the observant young man who sat on the grass beside the hammock—"and you know he hasn't got a dollar, nor any good way of making any that I know of; and yet when I come you run as though I was going to bite you!

"You could have everything you wanted," he began again. "And you know that I'm easy to get along with. There's nothing you could ask for that you couldn't have. There's the big fine

house over there on the hill that hasn't been used since my father died. You could have fixed any way you wanted. And, if you thought you couldn't be satisfied here, why, some day—it might not be so very long either—we could move away and live in New York, or any place you wanted.

"You know I'm making money now, even with all that money that I've got tied up in land. But it isn't a candle, it isn't a lightning bug! to what I'll make after that power ditch scheme comes through! And it'll be yours, Betty; all yours! Why, I tell you——"

"Click!" said Betty. George G. was not sure whether it was Betty's tongue or Betty's heels that had made the noise.

But Betty was at last stung to retort by the idea that she was being bought.

"Oh, money, money, *Money!*" she wailed. "I add up hundreds and hundreds and hundreds every day, and then add other hundreds to them, and take other hundreds away; and that's all there is to it! I'm sick, sick, *sick of it!* And that's all *you* can do with it—just add hundreds to hundreds, and take away so much, and there's so much left, and so on. And that's all there is to it!

"Can't you," she cried, "won't you ever, see there's more in this world than money!"

"Yes, by Jiminy! there is!" said George G., with what was almost a stroke of genius.

"There's you. And there's love. And I love you! And I'm going to climb that tree and get you!"

And Betty laughed. But George G. did not seem to mind *this* laugh. It was not the kind of laugh to make a man angry, exactly; or disheartened. Then Betty said: "You're too fat."

That was too much! George G. struck the tree on the first bound, and was hugging and scrambling his way up before Betty realized that he had moved.

Just as she started to get up on the limb where she had been sitting and swing up to a higher branch, and just when she was off her balance, George G. lashed out with a hand in the dark, and caught her foot.

Betty screamed, a piercing shriek in the dark night.

George G. let go, as though the shoe were red hot. He grabbed wildly with his other hand, for support, and clutched a dead branch.

The dead branch broke promptly with his weight, and George G. fell heavily to the ground. He landed on hands and knees, unhurt, and furious.

At that instant the lighted dining-room window of the house was banged violently open, and presently there appeared in the square of light Miss Susan Wilbur, Betty's ancient cousin and sole protector.

"Hoy! Hoy!" yelled Miss Susan valiantly. "There's just two lone women here, and a dog, and a calf; but we can shoot! And I'm agoin' to shoot, right there, right there where you are!"

In her arms she waved a gun, a terrific looking gun, fully six feet long.

George G. knew the gun. He knew that it had not been shot off for thirty years. He knew that it never would be shot off, because the lock was broken inside the stock, and had been so for thirty years.

But he cowered down against the tree, and groaned:

"Good Lord! Now Satan *can* write a book about me!"

Miss Susan's next words gave him life.

"It's you, Willie Hope. *I* know you! Get right off these premises, and right out of that orchard, before I do harm! An don't you ever come here near Betty again."

"She don't know who it is!" whispered George G. to his guilty conscience.

He hid his straw hat in front of him, where the light would not strike it, got the tree between himself and window, and made off across the orchard as fast as he dared.

He had forgotten Angela. Now he fell over her.

While he and Angela were scrambling variously to their feet, he heard a girl laugh.

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He grabbed Angela by the neck and shook her.

"Angela O'Toole," he said, "I am not a bad man. But *this* is *twice!* Don't cross my path again."

Then he proved what he had stated before, that he could jump a fence.

Later, Betty was lectured severely by Miss Susan in a nightcap.

"I don't call it nice at all, with *all* your education!" said Miss Susan. "You cutting up trees and didoes with Willie Hope! When if you were nice you could have George G. himself acalling on you! You *know* you could!"

"I'm sorry," said Betty sweetly. It was plain that she, too, was guiltily allowing Willie Hope to be maligned.

"But you're just like your mother," continued Miss Susan. "You *know* George G.'s father wanted to marry her for his second wife, long before you were thought of. But no, she must run off and marry another, and she wouldn't have *him!*"

"But, if she had," Betty argued sleepily. "If she had, where would *I* be now? And I couldn't have George G. then, anyway. So, my mother was right."

Miss Susan waved a thin maidenly arm, and demolished the sophism completely:

"Pshawnonsense! Who ever heard of such a thing!"

V

It was a warm night, and close. George G., looking out of his bedroom window past the outside stairway, which had yesterday tempted him to adventure and folly, felt that it was going to be a poor night for sleep. He had never lain awake a night in his life. He always went to sleep as soon as he had his ear scrouged into the right place in the pillow. And he never awoke until he heard Mrs. Raymond, who with her two children had rent free on his third floor, stirring about.

But this was a close and oppressive night, following a most disturbing day. Yes. George G. was apprehensive that he would not sleep well.

"Looks like a thunder storm," said George G. "Well, it can't hold any surprises for me," he philosophized calmly. "In the last two days I've seen all the ructions that ever were. A thunder storm ought to be a lullaby for me.

"*Con*found Satan again! What did I want to run away for?" (Just why Satan should be blamed for George G.'s cowardly flight from the pear tree does not appear.) "I ought to have stood my ground and talked to old Susan. I

could have shut her up. Now, she'll tell everybody that Willie Hope fell down out of the pear tree when she pointed the gun at him. Then Willie Hope'll prove that it wasn't him at all.

"Well then, if it wasn't, *who* was it?" Here George G. impersonated Miss Susan Wilbur.

"It was George G. Riceweather!" chanted George G., imitating the high, outraged voice of scandalized gossip.

"Pretty shape!" he commented dolefully, dropping the double-barreled conversation and returning to his own person.

"Hope the thunder storm scares old Susan so that she'll forget all about the thing!" he prayed.

"But it won't," he grunted, as he sat down heavily on the side of the bed and began to tug dejectedly at a shoestring.

He fumbled into his pajamas without further discourse.

His wearing pajamas to bed, in place of the majestic and lordly nightshirt of respectability, had been looked upon as a bad sign when he first came home from college at Colgate. People said that he would soon run through his father's money. But his perseverance in them had, in a way, established confidence in him. He had gone on wearing them. And he had kept his money. Therefore, it was shown that he was a young man of character. *He* could do such things, and yet keep his head.

It was said that the Catholic Priest wore them, too. But this was never properly verified.

He lay down without pulling the covers over him at all, for it was very close and warm, worried the pillow about under his head into every possible shape but the right one for sleeping on it, and finally decided that he would wait for the thunder storm.

After waiting a half hour—which seemed half a night—for the thunder storm, he got so angry at it for loitering on the way that he had to get up and go to the window to see about it. The thunder storm apparently was just as far away —and as near—as it had been before.

George G. refused to go back to bed again. He stuck his feet into an old pair of red plush slippers and started down into the bank. He was not nervous. He had no idea that anything was wrong. He would just go down and look around. He might as well be doing that as nothing.

There was no hallway on the second floor. The stairs came right up out of the bank to George G.'s bedroom door. George G.'s father had built the place in this way so that there should be no possible entrance to the bank from the upper floors except through this bedroom.

As the old man grumbled to himself: Why should he hire a watchman to sleep in the bank, when he could make the cashier sleep there for nothing?

George G. had been lonesome after his father died, and the cashier had married just about that time.

George G. gave the cashier a house to take his wife to, and he himself came to the bank to sleep. He said he could sleep there better than any watchman. But he really came there to live because his father seemed nearer there than anywhere else.

So George G., to be in the bank, had only to open his bedroom door.

He shuffled down the stairs and through the public part of the bank.

The night light left him and his pajamas exposed to the full view of the front windows. But this did not embarrass George G. For he very well knew that the public generally did not believe that he really wore the pajamas to bed. They thought that it was just one of the pardonable eccentricities of the rich, and that he had his clothes on under them all the time. Besides, there was no one out there to see him anyway.

He made his way to the cashier's cage, and put the toe of his slipper on the spring of the vault trap.

Half the floor of the cage rolled away, and he looked down into the lighted vault.

The vault had been his father's masterpiece of planning. It was cumbersomely and clumsily cunning, with springs and pulleys and running bolts in the cement walls, and George G. suspected that

a modern safe breaker would sneer at it. But it suited George G. well enough. And the safe itself, set down in the solid cement of the vault, was a good one.

He remembered why his father had always refused to have a time lock on the safe. He was afraid the clock would stop. That was what he said. But George G. knew that this was not the true reason. The truth was that the old man resented the idea of a time lock shutting him off from access to his money. If he felt like getting up in the dew of an early morning and going over to the bank for a look at his money, why he had a perfect right to do so. And he'd "be ding-danged if he wanted any clock to tell him that he mustn't."

So there was no time lock on the safe, and George G. went flipper flapper down the cement steps and began to twirl the combinations of the safe.

He could make the proper turns—to the left—to the right—half way round once—a double turn to the left—then the final number—in his sleep. But he always took them as carefully as if he were measuring lethal medicine. Every man loves to fuss with the lockers of a safe.

If the safe is his own, so much the better for all concerned.

The contents of the safe were just as George G. expected them to be. The bags of coin piled on

the bottom. The packages of bills bound neatly and pinned and labeled. The drawers of notes, liens and mortgages all properly shut and tidy.

And back on the top shelf, lying in serene state by itself, was George G.'s fortune.

He had other money. He had investments. He had other people's money, deposits, by thousands. But *this* was his own particular money, which no one else had ever touched.

This small bundle of stiff, unused bills, about three hundred of them in all, was George G.'s bulwark against all disaster. It was his irreducible, sacred *Reserve*.

So long as it was intact, George G. feared neither Low Tariff nor the Proletariat.

He took the money down and began automatically to count it.

There were five-hundred-dollar bills, an even hundred of them. And hundred-dollar bills, again an even hundred. And a third lot, of fifties, one hundred and sixteen of these.

"Over sixty-five thousand dollars!" said George G., patting the bundle.

"And you could put it all in a hat!"

In fact, you *could* have put it all into a hat—and not necessarily a very big hat, either—if it had occurred to you to want to put it into a hat.

George G. did not intend to put it into a hat.

It was his reserve. Part of it he was obliged by the law of the State to keep strictly in reserve.

But he had heard all about reserves, long before he had learned anything of the banking law of New York State.

"Some day there'll be a run on you, Georgie," his father used to preach it to him, especially toward the end, when the old man had turned talkative after a taciturn lifetime.

"And it won't be your fault. But don't tell 'em that; nobody wants to hear that. And you'll probably be sound enough. But that won't do you any good. Don't bother telling about it. Nobody'll listen to you.

"Not one thing in all God's world'll save you from shame, and maybe from jail, except cash, Georgie, cash, *Cash!*

"Cash, Georgie, *Cash!* Clean, crackling packs of it, to snap and rustle on the window at them!

"Cash, Georgie! Cash enough to shut 'em up and choke 'em with when you have to!"

And it was George G.'s gospel.

Some believed that wealth was real only when they saw it in broad, green, fat acres. Nobody could run away with that.

Other men might think that gold, dull gold, heavy and imperishable and defying the counterfeiter, was the one unfailing expression of power and solvency.

But George G. believed in his bills, his thin, flat packs of notes of the United States of America, that you could put in a hat, that had never

been handled by any one but himself, that would never fail him as long as the Country lived.

"Betty doesn't think much of you," he said, patting the bills as he reached them back into their rack.

"But she's young," he explained. "And just now she wants nothing but the moon, and Angela O'Toole."

He locked the door with a good sound slam, and then shook the handle vigorously, to make sure. It was locked, tight and secure, and George G. nodded with satisfaction. He had found everything just as he had been sure that he would find it. He had not been worried at all. But he felt much better now.

The vault was cool, and George G. was ready to get back into his warm bed and go to sleep.

He made his way out of the vault and through the bank, up to his own room.

His head was now completely cooled down from the excitements of the evening. He was sleepy.

"Satan's the boy!" he said, chuckling irrelevantly, as he clambered into bed and contentedly pulled the covers over him. "With *his* brains and *Dosia's* fighting weight, they ought to go a long ways!"

He went to sleep instantly.

The next thing that George G. remembered was that he heard robbers in the bank.

There was no mistaking the sounds. He had been listening for just those sounds for years.

He was not surprised, nor frightened. He had always known just what to expect, and he heard the sounds now, just as they should be.

There was the tip-*tap*-tip, tip-*tap*-tip, and the whirr of the drill; and then came the dull, punctuating thud of the explosion. They had blown off the door of the safe.

He went down through the bank, and stood over the open trap in the cashier's cage. He had brought no weapon with him. He had often thought that he ought to practice with a gun. But he did not now feel any need of one.

He looked down into the vault.

Two men were in the vault. They were just picking themselves up from the floor, where they had either been knocked down or had lain down to let the force of the explosion pass by. The circumstances were as plain to George G. as if he had been there to see the beginning. The safe door was open and, as it appeared, miraculously uninjured by the explosion.

George G. leaped down upon the two men.

He struck the nearest man full in the face, a stiff, short-arm blow, and the man went down into a corner.

But the other man was upon George G., with a knife.

George G. turned slightly away, but it was not in fear. It was good, sound strategy, for the man was smaller than George G., and as he lunged at

the latter's stomach with the knife, George G. caught the outstretched wrist and gave it a sudden pull and a powerful twist.

The man fell, whirling down upon his shoulder.

It was an old trick of the now departed lumber camps of the South Woods. George G. had learned it from old Ned McKanna years ago. It saved George G. from the knife, for in the vicious pain of the twist to his shoulder the man dropped the knife, and George G. grabbed it and tossed it up to the floor of the cashier's cage.

Now the man whom he had struck first came up from the corner, wary, but eager and full of fight, and grappled in at short holds. This was a dangerous thing for George G., because the man was a raw boned, tough muscled fellow, as big as George G., and apparently in harder condition. But George G. would not give ground, for fear of being crowded into a corner.

Like all stoutly built men, George G. wanted space and room about him when in action. So he grappled fairly in the middle of the vault with the big man, who looked like a hard, old-time Yankee boss of a lumber camp.

Round and round the two big men in the middle of the vault swung and shifted and flopped. George G. struggled and tugged and tore at the big man, trying to get purchase enough to heave him with a swing against the wall of the vault.

The knife, so far as George G. could see, was

the only weapon that the men had carried. So he thought there was no more to be feared from weapons. But there were other dangers.

The other man, the smaller man, from whom George G. had wrested the knife, now rolled from the corner where he had fallen, out toward the middle of the floor. George G. did not see that that the little man lay right behind him. But the big man with whom he was wrestling gave him a sudden push backward so that he stumbled over the little man's prone body and fell tumbling back into the corner.

Instead of being hurt by the fall, George G. bounced back to his feet in the center of the vault. And he carried a fight in each hand!

The two men were on their feet now and ready for him. But George G. only wished that they were a dozen! And that the place was a little larger.

He did not wait for them to rush him. He leaped at the nearer one, the smaller man—George G. thought he was an Italian—, and caught him with a swinging, stinging blow under the ear. It was the most satisfying, most beautiful blow that George G. had ever landed. But he did not follow it up, or wait to see its effect. He wheeled, on the rebound from his own blow, and struck the big man, the Yankee man, a full, smashing, head-on blow on the mouth.

Then it was slam-bang, and knock down! And

up and at them again! A desperate and a brutal fight! But George G. was happy.

For the first time in his self-restrained, careful life, he felt free to lash out and strike as hard as he could, and be just as mean and vicious as it was in him to be. All his life he had held back. Always he had had to think of what people would think. Now he need not care. So he struck and slugged and smashed with elbow or fist or knee, as it came handy.

He took some smashing thumps on his body, and some on his face. But he did not care. He did not feel them.

It was a silent fight, mostly. The deadening cement walls of the vault seemed to soak up the sounds of battle. And sometimes it almost seemed to George G. that he was looking at a fight instead of fighting one. There were no threats, no cursing, no windy talk about what any one was going to do, or have done to him. Only once the small man spoke to George G., complaining:

"What'se matter you don't croak? You fat guy."

That and the dull scraping of the men's boots on the cement of the floor were the only sounds.

What pleased George G. more than anything was the way in which his loose, flappy slippers now stuck to his feet. One or the other of them had always had a trick of flopping off just at the coldest spot of any floor that he happened to be walk-

ing on. Now he found that he could leap and side-step and back about the floor, as the shifting struggle of the fight went round and round, and those blessed old slippers stuck neatly to his feet as though they had been glued on him.

And he was as nimble as a cat. Fat guy? No, *Sir!* No fat man, no *stout* man, even, could make the fight that he was making! He had always known that he could fight, though he had never tried before. But he had never imagined that he was so good as this!

The Italian made a bolt up the stairs, as though he had had enough. But George G. remembered the knife lying up there on the floor. He grabbed the little man by the leg and swung him back down again to the floor of the vault. This seemed to infuriate the Italian, for he dove in at George G's legs, clawing, kicking and trying to bite. So that George G. was put to his very best to keep from being tripped and falling, while the big man continually shook and staggered him with heavy, crushing blows on the head and body.

But George G. could stand punishment. He felt that nothing could hurt him. He knew that he was as hard as nails and as strong as an ox. Why, he was not even breathing hard! He said to himself that he asked nothing better than to battle these two gentry to a fare-thee-well, right here and now.

In pure exuberance, he picked the Italian up

by the collar and threw him at the larger man. But this was a foolish move for the big man caught his partner in his arms and hurled him back into George G.'s midriff.

George G. swayed, and staggered, and stumbled to the floor. But he went down with his hand outstretched. And barely had his hand touched the floor when he was up again like a snapped spring.

Again they were upon him. The little man came flying at his legs, while the big man came boring in upon his upper body. George G. was pushed, not driven, but pushed into a corner. And there he fought at bay. He struck out blindly and wildly. He did not feel any blood on his face, but his vision seemed to be failing. His blows began to lack force and direction. His arms were tired, and his legs were heavy as lead.

The corner was choking him. He must get out of the corner!

He dove desperately along the wall of the vault, spinning the little man away from him, and came out with a leap into the middle of the floor.

There he met his big enemy toe to toe, and fought him hammer and tongs, and blow for blow, and two blows to one, until George G. felt sure that he had him almost beaten.

He could see the big Yankee's eyes beginning to wander. His long body was lurching from side to side as if trying to swing his blows. And

George G. knew that he had him just the way he wanted him. Just one good smashing punch to the jaw now would put the tall fellow out, and then George G. could take his time and his own leisure with the Italian.

He dropped back a little to get set for his blow, to put his weight behind it, to measure his distance for the point of the tall man's jaw.

Now was the time! But George G. had to wait. The big man was just a little too far away. *Again* George G. had his opening, again he drew himself taut, waiting for just the right instant to drop his whole weight in behind the blow and end the battle.

But the tall man coming up this time, caught George G.'s extended left hand and gave it a jerk, enough to unbalance him for his blow.

George G. turned furiously angry, and struck wildly and butted and pushed the big man away toward the corner. He could have followed him into the corner and punished him severely. But George G. wanted nothing to do with corners. He wanted to meet his man free here in the center of the floor and finish him with one powerful blow.

He must be cool. He *was* cool; he insisted that he was cool as the biting steel. Twice his man had escaped him. He would smash him so much the harder for that. But he must get just the right moment, the right distance, and the swing for his blow.

Now the big man was coming in again, crouching low, his arms working like piston rods from his sides, his head and neck, and his chin extended truculently to just the angle that George G. wanted. If he had posed his man, George G. could not have been better suited.

"Now, then!" said George G. to himself, and he let go the blow that was to annihilate the tall man.

But, in the instant while he swung forward, something dropped on George G.'s shoulders.

At first he was sure that a giant monkey, or a wildcat had jumped down from the floor above and landed on his neck.

He had completely forgotten the little man! But he was aware of him now. For he could feel the fingers clawing at his throat, and other fingers—it seemed that the animal must have at least half a dozen paws—were scratching at his features and gouging at his eyes.

George G. knew that he was doomed. For now the big man was down upon him, and he could beat him at will.

There was only one hope. He must run with all his might across the vault and, turning, he must dash the little man against the wall. The impact, under the momentum of George G.'s weight, would probably crush every bone in the little man's body.

But in the end it was the loose red slippers,

as might have been expected, that proved the final undoing of George G.

He lunged and ran for the wall. His right slipper fell off and his bare foot stepped on the flopping heel of his left slipper. George G. went tumbling headlong, with the Italian sliding up the back of his neck like a jockey slipping over the head of a falling horse.

As he fell, George G. saw that his head was going to strike the cement wall of the vault. There was no help for it. He felt himself shooting down with the speed of a plummet, and powerless to make an effort to avoid the collision.

He heard his head strike the wall with a terrific crash. And, most strangely, it was the crash of falling, smashing glass that he heard, as though he had struck a window instead of the wall, or as though the top of his head had been made of glass.

That was the end.

VI

THE crashing of glass was still reverberating through George G.'s head as he came swimming back to a painful consciousness. It gave way presently to the roaring of a wild wind, and as he raised his head he was struck in the face by a swirling gust of cold air.

His first thought was that the building had been blown away from over his head and that the vault was open to the sky.

A blinding flash of lightning revealed to him the astonishing fact that he was in his own room, on his hands and knees on the floor, and that the room was being flooded by a rainstorm driving in through his open window.

George G.'s practical habits took command instantly. He got up, steered carefully around the bed and slammed the window shut.

He did not wait to admire the blind rage of the storm. He grabbed his trousers from the foot of the bed, wet as they were, and hustled into them, pajamas and all.

He might be in time yet!

He felt that his head was still bleeding fresh from the fall he had gotten in the vault. So, no

matter how he had come to be up here in his room, he could not have lost much time. The robbers might still be in the building.

He pulled on his shoes, giving the laces one good hard twist, and then he was ready for further battle.

He switched on the light as he ran down the stairs, and then he saw what accounted for the smashing glass which he had heard.

The top part of the rear window of the bank, above the spiked bars, had been blown in, or had been broken in, or had first been broken and then blown in.

George G. did not stop to speculate on the sequence of these things.

He was in a tearing hurry to get down to the vault to see what really had happened. And his heart was pounding furiously at a rising suspicion. There was something *queer* about this robbery!

"Something fishy!" said George belligerently to himself, as he pounded in through the bank to the cashier's cage.

The floor of the cage was in its proper place. George G.'s suspicion leaped higher.

Then when he had opened the vault and the light showed him the door of the safe carefully shut, his suspicion bounded up into a mad and bewildering hope.

Could it be that the money was safe, after all? What if he had been having a nightmare!

When he got his hand upon the handle of the safe door he shook it roughly. But it did not shake as much as George G. himself shook in his tremor of surprise and wonder and mad hope.

The door was securely locked!

Three times George G. fumbled through part of the combination, and three times he missed it.

"I must get hold of myself!" panted George G.; and he literally took hold of himself.

He grasped his trembling right hand with his trembling left hand, and guided his right hand, slowly and painfully through the combination.

The door opened. George G. promptly sat down, weak and limp, but happy, on the floor.

His bags of coin, his racks full of bills, his tills full of notes; all were there in place, smiling at him.

Their smile was infectious. George G. began to laugh.

But his laugh never came to fulfillment.

His eye, looking at first into the dark interior of the safe, had not penetrated past the first outer rows of things. He had seen that these were unmolested. And in his first uncritical joy at seeing that he had not been robbed he had not cared to look further than the first rows.

But now his eyes, becoming adjusted to the dimness inside the safe, began to take in, casually, other things.

Quite naturally his gaze went up through the

wire shelves, to where his treasure, his reserve, his fortune—that you could put in a hat—was stored.

The laugh rattled and died in George G.'s throat.

He arose, groping and jerky, and shading his eyes—like an old man in a play.

He stood, finally, at his full height, his face level with the top shelf, peering in fascinated, but yet unbelieving, at the entirely *empty* shelf.

The money was gone!

His beautiful, thin, stiff packages of bills; *sixty-five thousand dollars!* It was *gone!*

He reached up and felt and searched, pawing with his fingers among the wires of the shelf, which he could plainly see was empty.

His reserve—his cash reserve—his father's pride and passion—the anchor of his own life, was gone!

He was at the mercy of any wind that blew.

He wanted to cry out. He wanted to call upon the whole town to jump out of bed and help him catch the thief. But he knew that he would not dare to do so.

At the very first word, at the first whisper of alarm, the town would be beating upon his doors, howling for the last pound of flesh.

And he could not meet them. He could not shut them up, and choke them, as his father used to say, with money.

He could not do it, because he did not have the money now.

Again he put his hand back, groping around the wires of the shelf, as a man will go on feeling through his pockets when he knows they are empty. His reserve was gone.

George G. sat down on the cement steps. For the moment all thought of giving an alarm, of calling the authorities, of doing anything at all, dropped out of his mind.

He could hear the roaring of the wind, as at a distance. He knew that his bank was being flooded with water from the open window. He understood that the forces of nature, the flight of time and the business of the world—if the world had any business—all these things were going on, regardless of what had happened to him. But he did not care. They might go on, or they might stop. All was the same to him. His reserve was gone.

Fear, the fear that had been grained into him by his father, fear which he had probably breathed with the breath of his mother's life, the fear of disgrace and public shame, was upon him.

George G. had never feared anything. He had never had reason to fear anything. What was there to fear, when a man could reach his hand back into his safe and touch enough money to make everything right?

It fell upon him like a crippling blow on the

backbone. He knew now that he had never been brave. He had never looked men fearlessly in the eyes.

True, he had walked about with a brave look on his face. He had met men and beaten men in all the games of strength and bluff. But it was never *himself,* George G. Riceweather, who had looked men down with level eye, who had faced the world four square and favor to nobody, who walked erect like a man.

No. It had always been the *reserve,* that sixty-five thousand dollars. That was what had walked around within him.

He had never been himself. He had been nothing but that money walking about and facing and bluffing people.

He himself was nothing. Now the money was gone, and here he was, quaking and shaking with fright, afraid even to call for help.

The robbers must have known. They must have known that he was hollow and false, or they would not have tackled him in the way they did. And how well they knew just what to take! By taking the reserve, and leaving everything else untouched, they had done just the thing that made it impossible for George G. to start a hue and cry after them. He could not get men out and scour the country around for those two. He could not, because he would in that case have to tell that he had been robbed. Then the inevitable

run would start on his bank, and he would not have the reserve to meet it. The reserve! That reserve had been his life. He could not live without it.

How could they have learned so much about him and his bank? And how wisely they had avoided touching anything in the front rows of the vault! If he had not come down himself, the robbery might have gone undetected for days!

And how carefully they had avoided carrying off anything heavy, or any papers that were in any way traceable. They had wisely taken nothing but the light, convenient bills, so light and so small in bulk that, as George G. himself had said: "You could put them in a hat."

"They must have planned it for years!" said George G. "It's the coolest, slickest, most daring bank burglary that's ever been done in the country! They must be city men," he concluded.

It was plain that George G. was attributing to his late antagonists qualities which, so far as we have seen, they did not possess. He could now see brains and even genius which were not at all in evidence in them during their battle with him in the vault.

Now George G. knew quite well that the thing for him to do was not to sit there and mope and slink and cower under the blow which had fallen and at the other blows that might come, but to get up and shoot off his revolver and blow his

whistle and call the Constable and get out a posse. But there was a great and dreary weariness upon him.

There was a bad taste in his mouth. He thought perhaps he had lain drugged for hours. He did not know what time it was when he had heard the burglars first. Nor did he know what time it was now. He did not care. His head was sore. He was lame all over. He sat and looked and felt and swallowed misery and despair.

His eye roved dully around the floor, and fell upon the old red slipper which he blamed for his downfall in the fight.

He leaped up, swooped down upon the slipper, and slammed it with all his might at the wall of the vault. It was just a bit of foolish and childish rage. But it served to rouse George G. out of the lethargy of despair.

He did not break out into any of his varied profanity. Without looking again at the slipper or the safe, he turned on his heel and stamped away up the stairs.

He unbolted the back door of the bank and stepped out into the pouring rain. It seemed that the burglars must have climbed out through the broken window, as they must have entered.

George G. closed the shutters over the broken window, and then stood a little while in the steaming splash of the rain. It felt good on his head.

When he came in he looked at the mess of rain water and broken sash and shivered glass upon the floor, debating whether or not he should clean it up.

The question was more important than might seem.

If he left the débris there, it meant that he would at once call Jeb Stevens, give the alarm, and publish to his depositors the fact that he had been robbed.

If he cleaned up the litter, it meant that he would say nothing except that his window had been blown in by the storm.

In the latter event, there remained two courses from which to choose. When he cleared the floor, he could then make his statement about the storm, and say nothing at all, forever, about the robbery. In this case he would have to stand the loss outright—which he somehow thought might in the end be the wisest course.

Or he might choose to say nothing in the village, but send secretly to Canton and Ogdensburg for the county detectives from the sheriff's forces.

His private inclination was to say that the storm had broken his window; and nothing more, absolutely. But the judgment of the world told him that this was wrong. He ought not to submit himself to a loss so great as this without an effort. Yet the first move that he might make would be

almost sure to bring on trouble worse, perhaps, than the robbery itself.

If he rushed out now and called people, there would be a run on the bank the first thing in the morning that would ruin him.

To meet a run, he had nothing but his day-to-day working funds. These were low at the time, for he had lately been putting money into a land and water-power scheme. It was good, sound investment. But he could get nothing back from it now. He had mortgages, stacks of them; but what good were they in the emergency before him? It would almost look as though he had purposely tied himself up in useless paper.

"Lord Amighty!" said George G., "I begin to feel as guilty as if I had stolen the money my own self!

"If I let them know, they'll come storming at the bank in a run.

"And if I don't let them know, and they find out that I was hiding it, why, they'll just want me skinned alive! Look what they did the other day!

"I don't know what to do," he said slowly, still staring at the litter on the floor, knowing that he must show his decision in that direction.

"I wish Betty was here. I could ask her what to do."

It was then, standing there wet, and miserable,

and disheartened, that George G. first knew how much he cared for Betty.

He had thought much about her. He had imagined and rehearsed brave passages of love-making for her. He had talked strange and unbelievable language to her in dramatically arranged scenes.

But this was real. And George G. knew it. He needed Betty now, as he had never in his life needed any one or anything.

He had wanted her to play with him. Now he found that he wanted her because he could not live without her. He could not raise his head against this storm that he felt was coming upon him without the help of her heart and mind.

And, being a man, he thought that that settled it. He needed her. He could not do without her. Therefore, she would be his, at the call of his need. Every man thinks that this is argument enough for any woman.

"I guess she'd clean up this floor, first," said George G. slowly. And he went over and got the broom.

His decision was taken. Betty would probably clean up the floor first. So, he would clear up the floor.

This meant that, so far as he was able, George G. would conceal from his neighbors the fact that he had been robbed. He would call upon the county authorities and ask for their secrecy—it

would not do to leave himself in the position of not having told any one at all. Then he would trust to his own efforts and the Bankers' Protective Association.

He swept the floor rapidly, gathered up the broken glass, carried it down cellar and covered it carefully in the ash bin. Just why it was necessary to conceal the broken glass, George G. did not explain to himself. Everybody who would come into the bank in the morning would be sure to see that the glass had been broken out of the window. Why George G. was afraid to let any one see the broken pieces was not plain. Nevertheless, he used up valuable time in getting them out of sight. Perhaps his head was still a little dull from the blow it had received.

When he had concealed the incriminating evidence—though why or how it was incriminating has never appeared—George G. seemed to be free for vigorous action.

He knew exactly what he must do.

The burglars were men of resource, that much was plain to him. Had they not taken off his safe door and put it back on again without destroying it? They had come from a distance, and they were now going away swiftly. They were too clever to linger in the neighborhood. They would make for Canada, and immediately. He must pursue them in his automobile, and he must go *alone*. They had a car, of course.

He could follow them. There was but one road for them to take for Ogdensburg and the Canadian ferry. And he could drive that road better than they could. Also, in doing this, he would have a chance to get out of Yaleville and telephone, and send the telegrams which he would not dare send direct from the village.

He ran upstairs and hustled into a raincoat and cap, and this time he grabbed his revolver from the bureau at the head of his bed.

"If I hadn't been a confounded fool and a ninny," said George G. bitterly to the gun as he stuffed it into his pocket, "I'd have taken you when I went down the first time!"

He did not wish that he had killed the two robbers. He did not wish to kill them now. George G. was not a bloodthirsty man. But he felt that his present business was desperate, and that he must be ready for every chance that turned.

He barred the back door of the bank and fastened the shutter over the broken window. Then he went out the front door into the rain, and turning the corner walked rapidly along the street that ran north, towards his own empty house where his car was.

As he passed Miss Dosia's door, he ejaculated:

"Confound Satan to Blazes, anyway!"

George G. seemed to believe that this whole disastrous business was part of a plot that had been loosed upon him from the moment when

Satan saw him going down the back stairs toward Miss Dosia's house.

With no connection whatever, he blamed Satan for everything that had happened since that moment.

On the open road, George G. drove without lights through the swish of the blinding rain. Somewhere along these twenty-five miles of road he felt that he should overtake the robbers.

He was sure that they could not know this road as he knew it. For fear of accident, they dare not drive as he was driving.

At Madrid Springs he drew up to the railroad station. The office was open, because the agent had to wait up for the two-thirty train.

George G. strode into the station and frightened the sleep out of the drowsy young man at the telegraph key.

He sent his telegrams, one to the Sheriff at Canton, and another to the Bankers' Protective Association, asking for a man.

Then he got police headquarters in Ogdensburg on the railroad phone.

The officer with whom George G. spoke, when he had learned who George G. was, congratulated him on the concise and complete description that he was able to give of the two burglars, the tall, lean, hard Yankee man, and the little, hook-nosed Italian. The officer was sure that he could, on the description given, go into a crowd and pick

out the two men. He would have the ferries, the Ogdensburg city ferry, and the Morristown and Red Mills ferries, all watched.

The men could not possibly escape. George G. was to follow them on the road just as hard as possible. No doubt, he would run them down long before they reached the St. Lawrence river.

Back in his car again, George G. threw things wide open and plowed on through the rain. Our North Country roads are not quite built for speeding. But in midsummer they are passable. There was a phosphorescence from the rain and the shifting clouds that made it just possible for George G. to see his way. He knew that he was going about twice as fast as it was safe for any car to travel this road. But there was a certain indisputable logic in his recklessness.

He believed that the robbers on the road ahead of him were more excited and more ignorant of the road than he was. Therefore, if they traveled as fast as he did, he ought sooner or later to find them piled up in a ditch somewhere. He would just steal up to them in the dark, take his money, his reserve, from them at the point of the gun, and then he would race back for home.

Or, if they did not travel as fast as he did, then he would overtake them on the road and disable their car, or cow them in a running fight.

There was, of course, one weak point in all this reasoning. His own car might go into the

ditch. But it had not yet done so. And George G. bounced on through the rain.

As he was passing through Lisbon Center, he ran out of the rainstorm, and he saw that the dawn was coming fast.

He was six and a half miles from the Ogdensburg ferry to Canada. The first boat—the robbers would, he reasoned, have timed themselves to reach the ferry just before the first boat was to leave—the first boat left at five o'clock.

The other car must be only a little ahead of him. He could not understand why he had not already overtaken it.

He must catch that car before it came into the city of Ogdensburg, or kill himself in the attempt.

He crowded on all the power that was in his car and strained his eyes ahead through the lifting mists of morning, looking for that other car, and his money.

And there *was* a car ahead of him! He could see the tracks of it now, slight tracks just visible here and there along the hard, rain-washed road, but sharp and clear enough to show him that they had been made within the very few minutes since the rain stopped.

And there was the car itself now, bobbing along past the line of the next farm!

George G. dug himself in down under the wheel and pulled upon every nerve for this last stretch of the all-night race. He could catch that other

car, he did not care how big or how fast it was, and he was going to do it within the next two miles!

Minute by minute he saw that he was drawing up on the car ahead. And now, to his surprise, he observed that the other car was not one of the high powered, wicked looking machines that he would have expected from his two efficient burglars.

It was, in fact, one of the humble, hard-working herd of cars vulgarly referred to as a Henry or Lizzie, as the sex may be.

George G. was disgusted.

"Racing the hammers of Hell all night," he grunted, "just to catch a Ford!

"But they must have had about three hours' start," he consoled himself.

He gained but slowly upon his quarry, for, although the car ahead was no great thing in itself, the man at the wheel was driving like one who would do or die.

George G.'s blood began to drill up through his sturdy chest, for he was now at the very crisis and blow-off of his whole exciting adventure of the night.

He pulled the pistol from his pocket and held it hanging from his thumb and forefinger where they lapped over the steering wheel.

The thing to do was to slip past the robbers

before they knew that they had been pursued, and then hold them at the gun's point.

But they saw him. It seemed that they had been watching for the avenger behind them. The Ford suddenly scuttled ahead like a drumming partridge, and threatened to leave George G. in the distance.

He set himself for a desperate drive. He knew that he could eventually catch them. But he felt that he must do it before they came in among the houses of the city, where they might jump from the car and dodge away from him with the money. The money, he remembered, would scarcely encumber them at all if they once got on their legs. It was so light, and so small in bulk! You could put it in a hat!

His own car, swaying and bounding under the mighty drive, leaped forward as though with animal instinct to spring upon the little Ford and tear it limb from limb. And George G. felt much the same. The latent savage was dancing through his blood. He wanted nothing better than to drive crash bang, crushing and tearing through the jumping Ford, and strike his enemies down and, iron shod, run them under foot.

He drove with all his might and all the strength of his car until he was almost upon the Ford. Then he pulled out and tried to pass. But the Ford was fully as reckless in leading as George G. was in pursuing.

The robbers pulled the Ford over just enough to crowd George G. to the ditch's edge. Another few inches, and he would have gone hurtling down over the hood of his car, probably to his death in the ditch.

With all his reckless rage of driving, George G. was obliged to hold back and once more take his trail behind the Ford.

With the wind drumming on his ears and his anger choking him, he yanked the car to the other side of the road and shot up on the other side of the Ford. If the robbers would stay for just a moment in the middle of the road, he could run by.

But just as George G. was at the rear wheel of the Ford, it swung sharply and, dancing like a drunken fly, swerved over in front of him, so that he had either to crash into it, or go into the ditch, or jam down his brakes.

Then George G. lost his head completely and thrashed from side to side of the narrow road, trying at the utter risk of his life to dodge by the robbers. There was barely room to pass on either side if the other car had stood still in the middle of the road; and the ditches were four-foot trenches dropping sheer at both sides. But the Ford danced like a gadfly, right in front of him at every twist of the wheel. How they could watch him, and discern his every shift almost before he had made it, and still guide their own car

right in his path every time, was more than George G. could understand.

"Pull over there and give me some of the road!" yelled George G., as though he thought that they might take him for an ordinary traveler demanding his share of the road.

"Swing out, or I'll take your wheel off!" he roared. "I'll push you into the ditch in another holy minute!"

But the only answer was that the Ford hopped crazily forward, always directly in his path.

Then George G. grabbed his gun and began shooting at their tires.

A hoarse yell from the Ford followed his first shot. But he did not notice any effect upon the tire.

The truth is that George G. was not more than an ordinarily good shot with a revolver. And it is not an easy thing to shoot a hole in a dancing tire in front of you, while yourself driving a car at top speed. But George G.'s blood was up and he was determined to wreck the Ford, by fair means or foul.

Twice, three times, four times, he fired at the fleeing tire, wholly forgetting that he would perhaps need a loaded gun more after the Ford stopped than he did now.

His fifth shot, by some accident, punctured the tire. And before George G. had swallowed the smoke, he saw the Ford give a flop to one side,

then turn sharply for the opposite ditch. Once more the crippled car flapped across the road, coughed a little, backed a few steps, and finally stopped dead, with the limp tire hanging over the ditch.

George G. leaped from his car and ran forward. He was ready to face the battle of his life, against men who were probably armed to the teeth. He had but one shot in his gun. But he did not think of that. He had fought these men before, and he feared nothing.

He expected to see the robbers jump into the road and begin shooting at him, or take to their heels. But there was no sign from the car. He could see nothing inside of it, for the curtains had been buttoned down tight against the rain.

George G. felt that he had better not be too foolhardy. He took a good short grip on his pistol and advanced cautiously.

There was no move from the car, though George G. seemed to hear a man talking.

He came, treading warily, up to the side of the car, and, gun ready, peered gingerly around the curtain.

A young lady sat in the middle of the car. She sat on the lap of a young man.

The young lady was weeping softly. The young man was holding her tight, and saying comfortingly:

"Don't cry, Hattie. The car's smashed, I guess. But he can't do any more than make you go back home now. And we can slip away just as well any other day and get married, and——"

George G. looked and listened. But his mind refused to take in the facts.

Where were his robbers? *That* was what *he* wanted to know. And he kept on staring into the car, as though he thought that the two young people were hiding his quarry from him.

"*Con*found———!" gasped George G., at last beginning to believe his eyes.

"Gee Whizz!" he complained. "You're not the robbers at all!"

The young lady squealed. Then she said:

"Why, Walter! It isn't Papa! Not at *all!*" From the tone, it seemed that Walter was somehow to blame for the substitution.

"I've been chasing 'em all night," said George G., still harping on his robbers. "I've followed you from Lisbon Center, thinking you were them."

The young man now looked at George G. for the first time. He put the young lady down on the seat, to look better at him.

He was a young man with a shock of well-cut red hair, a pair of shoulders that looked as wide as the Ford, and a rather white, serious-minded, slow-thinking face. His face now turned, approximately, the color of his hair.

He unlimbered somewhat more than two yards of himself, and jumped clear out of the car at one spring.

The young lady made an ineffectual lunge to grab him, crying:

"Walter, you are *not* going to fight, and leave me here all alone!"

The young man turned and pushed her gently back into the seat, explaining:

"I ain't goin' to *fight,* Hattie; I'm just *goin'* to *lick* this Mudhead."

VII

"I CERTAINLY thought that you were the men that robbed my bank in Yaleville last night," said George G. "I followed them all night in the dark, and when it was light I saw your tracks and thought sure I was right on their trail."

The red-haired young man seemed not to have heard a word. Or if he had heard, he paid no attention whatever to George G.'s explanation.

He continued to advance slowly and seriously upon George G.; while the latter, feeling that he had no cause and no will to fight, kept backing away, and stuffing his pistol into his pocket.

If George G. could have done so without showing himself a coward, he would have gotten into his machine and driven away, but there was no chance. And it seemed not unlikely that he was about to receive a sound beating.

There intervened, however, a violent commotion from the Ford.

The young lady came flying out and caught the young man expertly by the ear. She turned him around deftly and propelled him back into the Ford.

George G. stood stock still, filled with admira-

tion for the business-like methods of the young lady.

"Neatness and Despatch!" he exclaimed softly.

Then he remembered his robbers. He ran back to his car—the engine was still running—and drove it up past the Ford.

His private inclination was to drive on in hot pursuit of the robbers.

But he halted.

"I owe that young lady something," he admitted.

"And the young fellow is as bad as married, anyhow. Nothing can be done for him now. Notice the short hold she got on his ear! I might as well——"

He turned and addressed the Ford:

"Sa-a-ay! Were you folks thinking of going anywhere near the Canadian ferry? Because, if you were, I'm going right there myself. And I'm going fast. I'm bound to tell you, though, that I'm chasing robbers, desperate men, armed to the teeth. There's plenty of danger. But if you want to travel the quickest way to Canada——"

Again there was a violent eruption from the Ford.

"Hattie" was heaving suitcases into the road.

It seemed to George G. that there was a stream of suitcases. But that was probably because he was now sorry that he had spoken. He was nerv-

ous and fearful that he was wasting time, that these two would hamper him in his fight for his fortune.

Hattie followed the suitcases into the road, picked up one of them, and climbed into the tonneau behind George G.

It was plain that she, at least, was going to Canada.

Walter came later. And he was so deliberate that George G. glowered at him. But Walter did not seem to mind. He was like a man who followed fate—without quarreling, but without enthusiasm.

What was to become of the Ford is not known. Probably it was understood that when "Papa" should come up there, he would take it home with him.

Again George G. drove ahead at full speed upon his pursuit. He knew that he had lost so much time that he was not likely to catch his robbers on the road. But he could get to the ferry before the boat left, and he had little doubt that he would find them there.

His progress through the early morning calm of the streets of Ogdensburg was threatened, but not broken, by a single explosive encounter with a milk wagon and its driver.

The warning bell clanged from the boat as he drove down the street to the ferry. There was a little scream from the tonneau, but George G.

nodded back reassuringly and slid the car gently down the planks of the road to the gates of the ferry dock.

The police sergeant with whom he had talked by phone met him at the gate. He was looking out for George G., but the presence of the eloping party in the machine, and the muddy and bedraggled condition of George G., made the officer doubt whether this could be the banker from Yaleville.

George G. quickly identified himself.

"Are they here? Have you got them safe?" he demanded.

"Nobody came this way this morning," Sergeant Vail was positive. "I've been watching the road ever since you phoned. There's nobody come into this town. And they haven't gone by either of the other ferries. I've had both Red Mills and Morristown watched."

"Confound!" said George G. "Where could they go? Where can they be?"

"Oh, they might go by Malone. Or they might go by Massena. Or they might have gone toward Watertown. Or they might have gone south, into the woods. Or——"

"Or—Ror—Ror!" shouted George G., shaking both fists before him. "Or they might have gone into the ground! Or they might have gone up in the air!"

"If we only knew what the car was like," suggested the officer modestly, "or the number of it."

George G., who was now standing on the dock, wheeled and snorted at this suggestion, and stamped over to the ticket window.

His late passengers had by now bought their tickets and were safe on the boat.

George G. bought a ticket and went aboard himself. He stalked around the boat and looked over every man on it. There were six American drummers, three farmers driving wagons, two Canadians going back from a trip to Syracuse. George G. looked them all over fiercely, walking around them and staring them up and down. No one made any comment. They took him to be just "another Englishman." And let it go at that.

He went down the stairs to the fire room. But from there he was chased by the engineer.

He jumped off the boat as she was actually showing water between herself and the dock, and came back to talk to the policeman. He was cooler now, and willing to listen to anything that sounded like reason. But the policeman was not now in a position to offer any encouragement.

The robbers had not come this way. Of that he was sure. There were so many ways that they might have gone. And there was at least one way, by Messena, in which they could have

reached Canada more easily and quickly than by these ferries. Had Mr. Riceweather thought of that?

No, George G. had not thought about that. And it caused him no pleasure to be told of it now.

The officer did not say so, but it might be inferred that George G. had bungled the whole matter, as an amateur sleuth might be expected to do.

George G. turned and looked at the boat now driving out to mid-stream. In a few minutes she would be in Canadian waters.

Beyond the sense of his money loss, he felt depressed and beaten. For some reason, he felt that he would like to be on that ferry, running away from everything. He wondered if this was a premonition. Would it some day come to that —that he would have to run away like a thief?

But this was not like George G., to give in to a fit of foolish brooding. He shook himself and walked back to his car. His money, his reserve, was gone, so far as appeared now. But he must face his loss, and bear himself like a man. He thought hard and clearly for a moment or two, standing there squarely on his heels. And he realized sharply that not only his fortune, but also his honor, and perhaps his liberty—it might come to that—would all depend on his actions for the next few days.

His first act indicated the way of action which he would choose.

"Sergeant," he said, "get in, and let me drive you around to the station."

When the officer was seated conveniently, George G. pulled out a good roll of bills and, apparently without looking at them, handed them to his companion.

"That is an expense account," he said. "You can't do anything, anywhere, without spending money. You will have to spend that if you cover this case. When that is gone, if you need more it will be ready for you."

The policeman put the money in his pocket without a word, and it was plain that the business of the ride was finished.

George G. filled in the time amplifying upon the description of the two robbers.

When they came to the station house, George G. shook hands with the officer, and turned the car toward home.

In Yaleville, Jeb Stevens, the Constable, was taking a morning look around after the storm.

In his years of strife with the boys of the village Mr. Stevens had learned that one broken window leads to another broken window, as inevitably as a boy finds a stone. So it was to the interest of peace, and the law which he upheld, that he himself should know exactly what

windows had been broken by the storm. Then, if other windows were broken later, he would be able to hunt the crime down and lay it at the door of the right party.

He carried a little leather-covered book, in which he entered:

"Sime Larue's henhouse 2 pains

"Dosia Farewell back kitchen 1

"Abe Sartwell over Sayleses Store 1 light, 1 rooster knocked off vane N.B. find rooster"

Then he noticed that George G. must have risen in the night and closed the shutter on the back window of the bank.

There was something rather ominous looking about that tight dark shutter with the morning light beating upon it. That shutter was never known to be closed—certainly never outside of banking hours.

It was a protection. It gave light, night and day, straight through the body of the bank, and made it impossible for any one, even in the night, to move about in there without being observed from the outside. It was a matter of sentiment. People who had money in the bank—and some who had none, but who pretended that they had—liked to look right through the bank and out the back window. It gave them assurance that there was nothing unseemly going on in there where their money was.

The Constable stuck his notebook into his pants pocket and started for George G.'s back window to investigate.

The window was bolted, he found. It had not been blown shut by the wind. George G. must have come down in the night and gone out in the rain, in his pajamas, to shut it. The Constable could hardly believe it.

George G. was known to have slept through two fires which had been attended by every other individual, well and sick, in the village. Even when he was a boy, he used to go to bed and sleep through the celebration of the *"Night Before the Fourth."* In all his years George G. had never been known to be out of his bed at any improper hour, for any cause whatever. A summer thunder storm might scare other people, but that it should make George G. get out of his bed before the right time was hardly believeable.

A bell started ringing out on the street in front. The Constable pulled out a big silver watch, looked sharply at it, then looked up at George G.'s bedroom window, which by now should have been thrown open for the morning airing. George G. was a young man who opened his window every morning on principle.

The Constable looked around, for some one to whom he could make an observation.

Miss Dosia Farewell was the only person in

sight. She was standing on a stepladder in her back yard, tacking on a piece of cardboard over the broken pane of glass.

"George G.'s late! He ain't up yet!" shouted the Constable conversationally, above the ringing of the bell.

Miss Dosia took two tacks out of her mouth.

"Hope he *never* gets up!" she said. Then she put the two tacks back in her mouth, and went on hammering.

The Constable saw that George G. was not a subject upon which Miss Dosia would converse equably. He went around to the front of the bank. The ringing of the bell came from the veranda of the American House, where the proprietor, Mr. Joseph Bartlett, was walking up and down and whanging the official breakfast bell of his establishment very impressively.

It was not that Mr. Bartlett feared that his guests would be late for breakfast. They were never late for meals. But, for the first time within his recollection, he had a chance to ring the morning bell at George G., whose hitherto invariable custom it was to be seated, smiling and ready, at the breakfast table before the meal was at hand. So Mr. Bartlett swung his bell vigorously, and rehearsed what he would say to George G. when that delinquent should appear.

The Constable stood close up to the window of the bank, cupping his hands about his eyes, to

look in. He was still loathe to believe that George G. had gotten up in the night and gone down to lock that shutter.

He knew that he was running a risk to stand there peering in at the window. For if George G. should suddenly come down and find him there, he would be very angry. But that back window held him fascinated. His professional instincts told him that there was something wrong with it, but he could not make out just what that something was.

It was not in the nature of things that the Constable could stand there for many minutes staring into the bank without attracting attention and imitators.

In a way, this was the busiest time of the day on the street. The morning milk wagons were rattling to and from the factory. The blacksmith shops were ringing happy hammers on the rush of repair work that always comes about the middle of the haying. The storekeepers had their floors sprinkled and swept for the trade of farmers who might stop on their way from the butter factory, for now was the time of year when farmers had hungry help working for them, and they had to buy groceries. So the Constable was fairly sure to draw a crowd by doing anything even remotely sensational at the bank.

First came John Gibson.

"What you doin' of now? More depredations

bein' committed?" he inquired, flattening his face against the window in company with the Constable.

"What's goin' on here?"

"Ain't nothin' goin' on here," answered the Constable grumpily. Quite naturally, he wanted no volunteers bungling into his investigations.

"What you lookin' in the window for, then?"

"What *you* lookin' in for?"

"*I* followed a fool," cackled John Gibson triumphantly; "but you didn't *have* no fool to follow!"

"You gwan along about your business," answered the Constable. "Course, you ain't got no business. Never did have none. But gwan along about it anyway."

The Constable knew that this insult had been used so often that it had worn smooth upon John Gibson. It was practically useless as an insult. But he had to say something.

Mrs. Belle Gates drove up along by the sidewalk platform, evidently with the intention of stopping at Sayles's store. But she saw the two men staring into the bank. She stopped short and stepped lightly over the wheel of her buckboard milk wagon.

"George G. at it again?" she inquired hopefully. It seemed that George G.'s doings of yesterday and the day before had gone broadcast into the country, probably with footnotes and embellishments. Mrs. Gates lived four miles out

in the country and she rarely got into town except in the early morning, when there was never any excitement. She was frankly hoping that there was something wrong, and that she might see it.

"Constable's got his eye on somethin'," said John Gibson obligingly.

"Now move on," warned the Constable; "we don't want no crowd here."

Mrs. Gates weighed well over two hundred pounds. Though she was light of foot, she was circumferential and globular. The Constable did not mean to say that she was in herself a crowd. He had not, in fact, meant to indulge in any personality with the lady. Mrs. Gates believed otherwise.

She said:

"Well, you lop-eared, crookety, spindle-shanked saucebag! I'd like you to know that I've got more money in this bank than you'll ever have in the world. And I'd like to know who has more right to stand here in front of it, me or you?

"And if you think, just because you're Constable, that you can stand here and insult people about the way they're made, why, I'll just tell you——"

"Didn't say not a thing about how you was made."

"You lie, you did. Didn't he, John Gibson; didn't he?"

"Well, now——" John Gibson hesitated. He

was much more afraid of the lady than he was of the Constable, but he was a cantankerous old man, and he did not want to agree with either.

He did not have to choose. Mr. Joseph Bartlett crossed the street, and came along toward the bank, still carrying the bell, as though he intended to ring it in the ear of the sleeping George G.

"What all!" exclaimed the Publican. "Can it be that George G. is sleeping over? The last thing we looked for!" he commented, in the voice of one who mourns an unheralded visit of death.

" 'Tain't that," said John Gibson. "Constable's got his eye on somethin'."

"Ain't nothin' that *you'd* notice," said the Constable modestly. "But jest the same I ain't sure that there ain't somethin' wrong o' that back window."

"Shutter's shut," said John Gibson.

With one accord all four people turned to the window. So that now, instead of one, or two, faces flattened against the big window, hands curved about temples to ward off the light, there were four people standing staring intently and silently into the bank. Two very tall men, one old, one not old, one very stout woman, one very short man.

A gentleman crossed the street swiftly, stepped nimbly and noiselessly up on the high sidewalk, and stood observing the four observers.

"K . . . Ku . . . Ku . . . Ku . . . *Come on* in, the water's fine."

Jim Smith had arrived.

He asked no questions. He never asked questions. Information, for the mere sake of the facts, was useless and encumbering lumber to him.

Mrs. Gates bounded out of the line and gave him her place at the window. She herself could see nothing wrong in the bank. But she believed, and hoped, that Jim Smith might be able to.

As Satan had remarked the other day, Jim Smith was alive. His eyes were good, and so was his imagination. In one sharp sweep of his eyes he saw all that was to be seen.

The glass was gone from the upper part of the back window. There was no broken glass lying around. He had all the facts he needed.

The rest lay with himself.

What he himself believed, does not matter. He knew that it was a chance such as would not come to him again in a lifetime. It was one of the rare places where genius knows opportunity, and fame is begotten.

"Ki . . . Ki . . . Clee . . . *Clean* job!" he remarked, with an air of professional detachment.

"Clean job of what?" inquired Mrs. Gates, still unenlightened, and still delighted to be in the center of things.

"Tu . . . Tu . . . Tu . . . Tu . . . *Took*

the glass right out of the frame, and carried it away with them when they went. Didn't want to leave any finger prints," commented Jim Smith in a general way.

"Who took what? Where?" asked Mrs. Gates in a short-caught breath.

"R . . . r . . . r . . . r . . . r . . . r . . . robbers. Bank robbers."

"Oh, My God! My *Money!* Did they take *My* money? Did they, did they, Jim Smith?" she screamed at him. "Did they?"

"Tu . . . Tut . . . Tut . . . *Took* everything," said Jim Smith firmly. He was not a man to weaken or mince matters.

"Help! My Money! My Money! Help! Robbers!" she yelled, as the Constable came forward to quiet her. Then she yelled for her husband.

"Jim Gates! Big Jim Gates!" But that gentleman was at that time four miles away, busily pitching hay in his back swamp meadow.

"Now, here. Now, here," interposed the Constable, "we can't have this. You've got to stop screamin' an' noises on the public highway."

"Help! Murder! I will scream! And you, you scoundrel, that stood and let us be robbed in our beds; where were *you?* You can't stop me. Here's Johile Jenkins comin'. I'll yell to him!"

And she did. She informed Johile, at a distance of about three city blocks, that there had

been robbery, pillage and bloodshed done in the night.

The Constable knew that there was no more evidence of crime now than there had been fifteen minutes ago. He was not even yet sure that the glass was gone out of the back window, though it looked so. Jim Smith knew no more, the Constable was well aware, than a pair of eyes could see from the street—which was nothing.

Also, the Constable remembered that he himself had come off worst of all in the small riot at the bank the other day. Jim Smith had not been blamed much. George G. had not been blamed at all. But he, the Constable, had been abused by everybody he had locked in the bank, and by everybody he had locked out of the bank. And these two groups included all the people in the village and some from the country. So, as he viewed the matter, he thought that in the end he would probably get the worst of this, too. And he wanted no trouble around the bank.

"There ain't been no robbery, so far's anybody knows. And there ain't goin' to be none. And there ain't goin' to be no fracas around here. I *won't* have no crowds gatherin'," he argued, above the scoldings of Mrs. Gates and questionings of the gathering people.

But the Constable, for the purposes of controlling the rising excitement, adopted the wrong methods. He was negative, and non-committal.

He was abusive, and he told nothing. He ordered people to shut up, and to stop asking questions, and to go home.

Jim Smith, on the other hand, was accommodating and informative. He answered all questions, with no more hesitancy than was physically attendant upon it. In fact, in his hour of creative urge, he rose largely above his defect, and snapped back his answers to a rapid fire of questions with ease and flourish.

He did not speculate. He did not surmise. He did not deduce obvious conclusions with an air of wisdom, as a lesser man would have done. He did not pose as a detective or as an expert in crime. He had no theories to air.

He did not tell how the robbers had *probably* carried out their bold deed. He had no mock modesty, no deferring to the opinions of his audience.

He gave circumstances, figures and details. People could take them or leave them. Mostly they took them.

"Nin . . . Ni . . . Ni . . . *Ninety*-nine thousand, four hundred, eighty-six dollars and thirty-seven cents," he announced. "Gone, clean as a whistle!"

"But it wouldn't be gone, if this black-leg of a Constable hada watched!" wailed Belle Gates. "He was here first. Even before I got here! He

mighta been here all the time. He mighta been one of them!"

No one, however, seemed to pay much attention to this. In fact, no one paid any attention to anything, or anybody, except to Jim Smith.

"Ku . . . Kick . . . Kick . . . *Cut* the door right out of the safe with acetylene flames." (Jim Smith was himself a skilled mechanic. And as for safe-breaking, it would have surprised nobody to learn that he was an expert.) "Never made a noise louder'n the singin' of a tea kettle!"

"Where's George G.?" demanded Johile Jenkins. Johile's way was always to deal with principals only.

To a less resourceful man, this would have been a stumbling block. George G. had to be disposed of, somehow. That he had slept all through the night while his money was being stolen was hard enough to believe. But that he should be sleeping now, long past his usual rising time, with all this din going on at his front door, was impossible.

To Jim Smith, however, nothing could be simpler.

"Nun . . . non . . . *Knocked* on the head in his bed," he stated. His tone was respectful, but firm. "Sleepin' on his back. Always slept on his back, so he could hear with both ears. But they got him before he heard a sound. Never moved a finger."

There were no gruesome details. With the instinct of the true artist, Jim Smith knew the value of restraint. There was no gore, no playing to the morbid instincts of the crowd. A simple whack on the head. And George G. was gone; disposed of, out of the way, at rest.

"Where did they come from? Did anybody see them?" This referred to the robbers. It was a probing question, with an unmistakably skeptical twist.

"Gu . . . Gig . . . Gig . . . *Got* off the Utica train at Potsdam last night. Went to the Albion House and *pretended* to get drunk. Hired an automobile about midnight, and made out they were goin' joy ridin'. Got here at a quarter to two. Cleaned up the job. Drove straight to Barnhart's Landing. Stole a boat. Drove the automobile over the bank into forty foot of water —it'll never be found—and rowed themselves over to Canada."

Jim Smith had not answered all of the question. He had not stated whether or not any one had seen the robbers. But only a very hostile and carping critic could have asked for a more laconic sequence of events.

If Jim Smith could have gotten rid of George G.'s body as completely as he had disposed of the automobile, his tale would have been impregnable.

As it was, the continued presence of the corpse

up in George G.'s bed was a thing that would inevitably demand attention. Jim Smith knew this. But he was not yet ready to take the matter up.

On the other hand, the town undertaker, Mr. Albert Hack (In Yaleville there were no hacks, funeral or otherwise. So the name had no professional significance whatever) was interested only in the corpse.

"Shouldn't somebody ought to go up and see about George G., about the—remains?" he suggested to the Constable. He hoped that the Constable would open the door and let him go up, so that he would be sure of the funeral.

Jim Smith heard the suggestion. And he squelched it.

"Jij . . . Jij . . . George G. always had his own private undertaker from Potsdam," he said, with curt finality.

The undertaker did not speak again that day.

"Ring the bell!" yelled Belle Gates in the interlude. "An' bring the people here, an' let them know what's been done to us!" (Every person in the town who was not completely bedridden was either here or on the way here.)

And there were other voices:

"Constable, why don't you swear in a posse, and hunt the robbers?"

"Ain't seen no robbers yet," asseverated the Constable. He still considered that he was the

only sane person in the crowd. He knew that Jim Smith was lying, entirely, out of whole cloth. Yet he knew that he himself had hesitated too long. He had let this thing gather headway, and now he was sure that if he took any positive part in it he would be roundly abused in every event.

"Them slick burglars always have the police with them," said some cynic on the edge of the crowd.

"Why don't you open the bank, then, and let us see?" complained somebody. It seemed that everybody wanted action of some sort, except the Constable and Jim Smith. The former held back because he was afraid to do anything. And the latter was having too good a time to brook any interference.

"Where's the cashier? Where's Norm Farnsworth? Why don't he come and open up? We've got a right to know where we stand."

In some sections of the now fair-sized crowd, it seemed that the murdered George G. and the robbers were already forgotten, and that a meeting of depositors and creditors was about to be called.

But these were rather the sporadic outcroppings of the excitement. The main purpose of those present was to get up as close as possible and hear the facts as they came forth, new-fledged and clipped, from Jim Smith.

"Bub . . . Bu . . . B . . . Bub . . . *Bank*'ll pay thirteen cents on the dollar," he stated conclusively. (He had already explained that George G. had unfortunately invested the greater part of his funds—and of everybody else's—in a land and water-power scheme to cut across the big loop of the river and establish an enormous power plant. This was true in part. Some of the hearers knew it. Some did not. Therefore it seemed doubly authentic. Even George G. would have had difficulty in drawing the exact lines within which Jim Smith was, respectively, telling the absolute truth, and drawing probable conclusions, and lying like sixty, in his review of the present condition of the bank. But at any rate, Jim Smith proved that the bank was defunct.)

"Twut . . . Twu . . . *Twenty*-four old people'll go to the poorhouse this winter."

"Is the bank failed *already?*" inquired Adelia Fairchild fearfully. Only the day before yesterday she had held every cent of her money in her hands. And foolishly she had put it back into the bank. *Now* the robbers had it.

"Bub . . . Bub . . . *Bank*'ll be open just an hour and a half. The Superintendent of Banks'll be here at ten-twenty-eight." Jim Smith gave the head of the Department of Banking of New York State just two minutes to close the bank after he should reach town.

"Here comes Norm Farnsworth now," said some one looking up the street.

It would seem that by reason of his position the cashier of the bank should have been one of the first on the scene. Instead, he was one of the last of the able-bodied people of the village to appear.

Even now, he came only half-heartedly. Since the fright of the day before yesterday, he had lived only in momentary expectation of some such horror as this. And he was in no hurry to be a part of it.

But he was coming. And his wife was coming right behind him. He was an under-sized little man with a scrawny look, but in his own house, and at the bank window, he was a tyrant and a man of iron.

His wife was a big woman, handsomely middle-aged, gentle of heart, slow to anger, capable and long suffering. She knew that Norman Farnsworth was a coward, a bully to her, and a weakling. But she had never told him so. She could at any time have beaten him to submission with her broom, but, far from that, she even kept him thinking that she was afraid of him. And the reason why she was now following at her husband's back was that she knew he would act more bravely, more like a man, in this crisis if he saw her around in the crowd. He would believe that she, at

least, was afraid of him, and he would take courage.

The love of a big woman for a little man is a holy and a fearful thing.

They had been startled from their breakfast by the horrible news that the bank had been sacked, and that George G. was lying murdered in his bed. Now Norman Farnsworth found himself hustled into the center of a threatening and terrible mob of men and women, who seemed to be putting the responsibility in this whole terrible business upon him.

"Open the door, Norm," they demanded. "And don't let us have any nonsense about it. We've got to know just how bad it is."

There was, perhaps, a certain restraint upon the crowd, from the thought of the lethal tragedy of the back room on the second floor. They were not as loud as they might have been. But they were angry, and they were bitter. They were just a crowd of our average rural people, and their money was pretty nearly everything in the world to them. To Norman Farnsworth, it seemed that they were thinking only of tearing him to pieces.

But he would not open the door. He looked at his wife, and stamped his foot at her. And he swore mentally at her that he would not open the door.

When he spoke, he still kept his eye on his wife, and his voice was the voice of himself, in his own house, to his wife.

"This bank is now in the hands of the Law," he announced roundly, still swearing mentally at his wife, "and nobody goes into it, not even me, except in the name of the law."

Upon that ground he stood, and he could not be moved. The crowd threatened him and abused him. They even said that he was purposely giving the robbers time to get away. But he stuck his hands into his pockets, and glared at his wife, and stood his ground.

They called upon the Constable to make the cashier open the door. But the Constable refused to interfere. Then they ordered the Constable to open the door himself. But the Constable had had an experience with George G.'s door only the day before yesterday. He feared trouble with George G., alive or dead.

A girl came walking over the bridge. She was listening to the ringing of the Methodist church bell. Some one was ringing fright and fire and panic out of the bell.

For the moment, she was alone on the bridge in the beauty of the young day. The slightest wisp of mist came up out of the deep chasm of the river, shimmered about her an instant in the sun, then was gone into the upper air, and she was alone again upon the bridge.

She was very pretty and good to see upon the bridge, and she carried herself regal and light as a færie yacht above the phantom sea of the river's mist. But every few steps she caught herself slipping from her steady, even walk, and breaking into a hurried little trotting patter of shoes upon the planks of the bridge. Try as she would, she could not altogether control her feet. Yet she very much wanted to control her feet, and her hands, and her face, so that people might not know that her heart had been turned to lead within her, that her knees were sinking under her, that she had to fight with herself for every step she took toward the horror that was already burning its picture into her heart.

Only last night she had learned, in the swift revelation of a girl's heart, the joy of teasing George G., of running from him and making him run after her; of pretending to be afraid of him, while listening for the sound of his pursuing steps.

And now, they said that George G. was dead. Murdered in his sleep. Just like some one hundreds of miles away, that you never heard of, that you read about in the newspaper. Murdered in his bed. Just like a little short item you might glance down the paper at and never stop to think about.

Betty Saunders did not believe it. She would not. She could not believe it.

He might be hurt. She could imagine him

fighting like a tiger for his own. But, *dead! Cold!* His strong arms and his big warm body! And his face that pouted like a little boy's when he could not have what he wanted. Dead, to be put in the ground? No! No!

And yet there was the crowd, wrangling and arguing about the bank. What were they doing there? What did they want?

Oh, yes! They wanted their money. That was what Len Squires had shouted as he drove past the end of her lane with the news. George G. was killed, he yelled, and all the people's money was gone. That was what they were thinking about. That was what Belle Gates was shouting now as Betty came off the end of the bridge.

Couldn't they ever think of anything but their greasy money!

Betty had added up that money and subtracted it and balanced it so many times that she hated it and everything connected with it.

She would not come down the street and cross directly in front of the bank—as would have been easier for her to do. That would have brought her directly into the center of the crowd, where she wanted to be, to hear the truth. But she could not face it.

Instead, she crossed the street straight from the bridge and came stealing down among the crowd that was strung along the sidewalk, keeping herself as close as she could to the buildings.

She must have had some queer idea of keeping herself out of sight, of trying not to be seen. Yet every woman, man and child knew that she was the girl whom, only day before yesterday, George G. had proposed to marry. That is, he had proposed the matter to Miss Dosia Farewell.

Some one said:

"Here comes the bookkeeper, now."

Betty shivered, and could hardly keep her feet from bolting through the open door of Sayles's store. But she kept on, and crowded gently and persistently down to the bank building itself.

A portion of the crowd was still dead-locked with the Constable and Norman Farnsworth, about opening the door.

"*I* will not open the door," said Norman Farnsworth deliberately. "And the Constable will not open the door," he said further, still swearing under his breath at his wife.

"I ain't got no authority," complained the Constable. "You got to git a warrant."

But Jim Smith, as always, held the major interest.

"Bub . . . bu . . . *Be* in Montreal in time for a late breakfast," calculated Jim Smith, in answer to a question about the flight and the probable route of the robbers.

The next question was a pitying one, about George G.

"Nin . . . Nin . . . nin . . . N . . . *Never* moved

off his back. Just lies there like a man asleep."

Betty swayed and staggered. But in the swaying of the crowd it was not noticed. She thought she was going to fall and be trodden underfoot. But she did not care for that.

She only wanted to get away. Like a hurt animal, she only wanted to crawl away and be hidden.

With no volition of her own, she was somehow moved, or pushed, back into the narrow passage between the store next door and the bank.

She walked slowly back through the alley, not conscious that she was going; just moving, just to get away from the sight of people, until she came out in the open yards at the back of the stores.

She noticed the closed shutter on the back window of the bank. She had never seen it shut before and, mechanically she went over and tried it.

It was locked tight. But that told her nothing. If she had been in possession of her usual quick senses, she would have laughed at the idea that the robbers had carefully bolted the shutter on the inside, after going out through it and closing it.

She saw none of the ridiculous side of the matter. Because, right over her head was the window of George G.'s room. Her whole mind had been shocked into a numb insensibility, in which only a picture remained—the picture of poor

George G. lying on his bed, cold, and silent, and *fearful.*

She looked up at the window, and, hastily, with a little whimper, as though she already saw the awful sight and could not bear it, she threw her hand across her eyes and stumbled out to the foot of the stairs that ran down past that window.

She stood a little while, leaning on the rail, and looking dully down at the steps.

Her body moved, and one foot, unconsciously, found the bottom step. Then her other foot moved and found its place on the second step. She did not realize that she was going up the stairs. Yet she had been going straight to do this thing, just this very thing, from the moment she had left the door of her home.

George G. was gone. He would never be hers. But the picture that had burned itself into her mind was forcing her, like an iron hand upon her neck, to go forward, to drag herself fearfully step by step, to look upon the terrible reality. It was her right. It was *all* that was left to her. She would have him to herself for at least the little moment that she looked upon him.

People passed, and perhaps saw the girl on the stairs—for there were still some people who had not yet reached the front of the bank—but they paid not the slightest attention to her. They were heading as swiftly as their physical condition per-

mitted for the human center of interest, where the crowd was.

Betty wavered. She was alone. A frightened, heart-broken girl. And death was very cold and clammy and awful. She had to hold her hand before her eyes all the time now. And yet she knew that she was going up to that window, and was going to look in and see George G. lying dead.

She did not want to do this. But it was all there was for her to do. This was all she could ever have of her love, to look in through a window, upon his dead face.

As she came stealing fearfully up to the level of the window, forcing herself to peer past the hand that still shaded her eyes, she found that from the stairs themselves she could not see into the room farther than the foot of the bed and one of the bare walls.

The stairway, though from the ground it seemed to be practically in front of the window, was really built to one side, so that Betty now had a view of less than a third of the room, and that was mostly blank wall.

Now she did not need to hold her hand before her eyes, for the brick wall of the building came between her and the thing she had forced herself up here to see.

Every frightened, curling nerve in her body was telling her to turn and run down the stairs, away from the horror, away to where there were peo-

ple, and living things. But she knew that she would not turn back now.

Through the open steps, she could see the narrow beam that ran from the window out to the stairway. It had been put there to steady the stairway. On it, only day before yesterday, at the beginning of all things, George G. had climbed out—to make his momentous call upon Miss Dosia.

Betty slipped under the railing and stuck her foot tentatively out on the beam.

If she could stand straight up on the beam, let go the stairway, and take two or three little steps unsupported, she could then grab the bars of the window.

She did not look down. She did not dare do so. She did not look toward the window. For another reason, she did not dare do so.

She kept her hold upon the stairway, as far as she possibly could, to the very last tips of her fingers, edging out backwards on the beam inch by inch, until finally her fingers lost contact with the supporting wood and went groping uncertainly above her head.

She turned in the air and took one good step toward the window. Then, for the first time, she saw the free distance between herself and the ground.

Her heart jumped up into her throat, and her head began to spin. She was horribly frightened.

She thought she was falling. But before she fell, she took another step, and then, surprisingly, another, and then, just as she really *was* falling, and knew that she was falling, her outflung hands struck one of the perpendicular window bars—and held!

When Betty recovered enough equilibrium, and breath, to think, she found herself sitting tremulously on the beam, and staring full into George G.'s window.

She was so glad to find herself safe that her mind was swept clear, for the instant, of its horror, and she sat looking contentedly straight into George G.'s room. And right at his bed.

But—But, there wasn't anything wrong with the bed at all!

Why, it was just like *any* room!

She could see just how George G. had thrown aside the light bed-clothes and jumped up out of bed—just like anybody, anytime!

And there was one of his slippers under the bed!

And his clothes and his shoes were gone! Why, George G. had just gotten out of bed and gone away somewhere!

And it was all a big lie! Just one of Jim Smith's *great, big lies!*

Betty laughed out loud and shook the bars, bubbling with great sobs of joy, and laughing through them.

Then she flung herself away from the bars and turned quickly to the stairway. She must hurry and shout her discovery to everybody!

Betty forgot that she was performing in mid-air.

The first thing she knew, she was falling and sprawling out along the beam and whirling madly down around it, like a cat around a pole.

She got part a hold with her hand upon the beam, but as her body fell free and the weight of it came down on her arms the grip of her fingers gave way, and she fell—feet down, it is true, but in the wildest disorder—plump into the soft earth of the yard!

It was inglorious. But it was not tragic.

Betty got up, not hurt—much, and laughing again. She shook the dirt from her dress and started to run around the bank, by the street that ran north.

As she came around the corner where the crowd was gathered, she slowed down to a walk, but she was still laughing. She walked straight through the crowd and right up to Jim Smith, who was saying:

"Kic . . Kk . . . Kick . . . Can't do anything till the Ku . . . Ku . . . *Coroner* gets here. Never touch a corp——"

"Go round and up the stairs and look in his window!" shouted Betty, laughing right up into his woe-begone face.

It was too much for Jim Smith.

A merry, wicked laugh danced up into his eye for an instant. He fought it down. Choked on it. And then he went off into a violent fit of coughing, with such abandon and with such dangerous straining that the crowd made way for him and he squirmed himself away.

Johile Jenkins, who was a man of action, grabbed the Constable by the collar, and propelled the branch of the law around the corner, upon official investigation. Everybody, except Betty, Jim Smith and Norman Farnsworth, followed on the run—even Norman Farnsworth's wife.

Betty looked at Jim Smith standing there, grinning, but somewhat wind-fallen.

"Jim," she said, still laughing, for she had all the time been near hysterics, and she could have cried now without trying, "Jim, you'd better go away somewhere."

"Spuss . . . Sp . . . *Spoiled* the party," he complained. "But I won't hold it against you," he hurried on magnanimously. "I'll be back to dance at your wedding."

He wheeled, and walked jauntily up the street.

"Open the door," said Betty to Norman Farnsworth.

The cashier unlocked the door which he had defended at the expense of so much silent profanity on his wife.

Betty followed him in and proceeded to find

all things in order for the business day of a bank.

George G. heard the ringing of the Methodist church bell while he was still a mile away on the Ogdensburg road.

"What confounded racket are they up to now?" he inquired, staring ahead over the village.

"Never have a fire in the summer time," he argued.

He was trying to think up some cause, not connected with himself or his bank, for the ringing of the alarm bell. But it was no use. He was sure the town wouldn't get excited early in the morning like this unless it was some further trouble for himself.

He could even hear the call of his own name in the frantic, staccato ringing of the iron bell.

"George G.!—George G.!—George G.!" it was saying.

Maybe they've caught the burglars, thought George G.

"Then, what are they ringing the bell for, if they've got 'em caught?" he snapped back.

"If they haven't caught 'em, I suppose they're ringing the bell to keep the robbers away!" he said sarcastically.

He forgot, for the moment, that nobody in the town could possibly know anything about him or his robbers.

He raced down the road that ran north, past his own house, making straight for the bank, for

he had an instinctive certainty that the trouble was there.

As he dashed past the houses that were plainly empty of people, some of them with doors standing open as the folks had run out and left them, George G. began to look angrily for some one whom he might question.

A block or so ahead, he saw a man put a hand on a garden fence post and vault nimbly into the road.

As George G. well knew, there was but one man in the town who had the style and snap about him to clear a fence in just that way.

It was Jim Smith. (He must have made a quick detour through the back yards.)

George G. slowed down, but he did not intend to lose any more time than could be helped.

"Jump in, Jim," he shouted, long before he came to a stop.

Jim Smith hesitated for the moment. He knew that it might be safer for him to keep out of arm's reach for a time.

But he could not resist. The idea of leaving George G. dead, waiting for the Coroner—and then, two minutes afterwards to come driving madly back into town at George G.'s side, was too dramatic for Jim Smith to forego. If they hanged him, it would be worth it, he thought.

"What in *Time* are they ringing the bell now

for?" demanded George G. while Jim Smith was still on the step.

Jim Smith settled himself chummily in the front seat beside George G.

"Gug . . . Gug . . . G . . . *Gossip,*" he pronounced. "Some gossip about the bank."

"Gossip? What gossip? What gossip?" inquired George G. fiercely.

"Ju . . . Juj . . . J . . . *Just* gossip. Something about a robbery. About you bein' hurt, somehow."

"But, how in the name of the Blowers of Hell's Bellows! did they come to know——?"

George G. caught himself up sharply. He had started to ask how anybody could have come to know that he had fought with the robbers, and that he had been cracked on the head; but he remembered that he must not, for his very life, let anybody know that he had been robbed. If *that* got out now, it would start a run on his bank that would ruin him before noon!

George G. let his question die in midair. They were now passing Miss Dosia's house, and he got a view of his now famous back stairway. Or rather, he would have seen it if it had not been crammed three deep and draped with people from top to bottom.

"GREAT JEHOSOPHAT!" swore George G.

He turned the car on two wheels and shot it

right into the yard, among the less athletic half of the village of Yaleville who had not been able to get up on the stairway, regardless of whom he might maim.

Johile had the Constable by the slack of the back and was shoving him out on the beam, for they had found, just as Betty had found, that George G.'s room could not be seen well from the stairway.

The spectacle of George G., in the flesh, careening into the yard, with Jim Smith sitting, polite and mildly interested, beside him, was more startling to the people than if his ghost had appeared at the window.

It so frightened the Constable, thus caught in an inexcusable and dangerous position, that he rattled on the beam.

George G. stopped the car directly under the beam. Then he did one satisfying thing that he had been aching to do for three days.

He stood up on the seat, reached up and caught the Constable about the middle with his two hands, dragged him off the beam, and stood and flung him as far as he could.

Then George G. looked down and saw Satan standing near, smiling pleasantly.

Satan had been one of the last comers to this affair. He was entirely innocent of any part in it whatever. But George G. did not know that.

Somehow, he had begun to blame Satan, generically, for all his troubles.

"Satan," he roared, "if I find you at the bottom of this, I'll horsewhip you!" And he did actually make a foolish grab at the corner of the windshield, as though he thought that the time was years ago, and that there was a horsewhip there handy at the old place.

Having thus made himself plain, and foolish, George G. jumped out of the car, and said to Jim Smith:

"Take the car up to my house, will you, Jim?"

Although it was an interesting gathering, such as Jim Smith would not ordinarily have missed for any money, he backed the car out of the yard and turned up the street with quite surprising alacrity.

George G. turned and walked stiffly toward his bank, ignoring the whole disgraceful rout. But he had not yet settled with Belle Gates. She had been at the center of this matter from the beginning, and now she took hold of the very key of it.

She was on the ground, because by reason of the laws of space and gravity she had been beaten in the rush for the stairway. And she planted herself directly in front of George G., exclaiming loudly:

"And you wasn't robbed, and the bank wasn't robbed, not at *all!*"

"No!" roared George G., not realizing the pit he was digging for himself. "No, of course I wasn't robbed! Craziest darn-fool question I ever heard tell of!" he shouted. And he walked around her, and around the corner, and again around to the front door of his bank.

Norman Farnsworth was in his cage. He heard George G.'s angry step in the bank, and he believed that there would be a storm. He stayed in the cage.

George G. walked straight on through, and back to where Betty sat behind her partition at her bookkeeping desk.

(It might be said that Betty had just that moment raced back to her place at her desk, that Betty had, indeed, been listening at the back window. But we will not say it.)

As George G. came into view, Betty jumped off her chair and ran toward him, a few steps.

For one mad, mind-whirling instant George G. hoped, and almost believed, that she was running right into his arms. But she stopped. And stopped him.

Her glad face turned sorrowful. She looked at him tearfully, and in the tone of a loving and long suffering, patient mother of twins, she reproached him:

"George G., why *won't* you behave!"

George G. stood like a post that has just been driven into the ground. His hands went out in

front of him, then they went up in the air. He pulled off his cap.

"Why wont?—*Behave?*——" he groaned weakly.

George G. thought of his terrible battle in the night for his property and his honor. Of his wild, heart-breaking ride through the dark, to recover what was his all in life, except Betty. Then the disgraceful, shameful riot at the back door of his bank. All the whole world conspiring against him! And *then* to have Betty as good as tell him that he was cutting up didoes, and monkey-shines!

He could not bear it.

He stumbled to a chair and sank heavily into it, covered his face with his hands, and began to murmur gently:

"Why *won't* I behave? *Why won't I behave!*"

VIII

BETTY climbed back upon her bookkeeping stool and watched George G.

There *was* a bump on the front of his head. A *cut,* or a scrape, it must have been. Had there been trouble, then, and had George G. really been in danger?

But she immediately remembered the night before, when George G. had flopped down out of the old pear tree. She laughed half aloud.

George G. got up and walked away stiffly into his private office.

Betty was puzzled. George G. was angry—not just pouty. She knew she should not have laughed, of course. She had not meant to laugh at *him.* But it was so funny to remember—through this morning's hideous fright—the figure of the irreproachable George G. tumbling out of the tree! And facing Cousin Susan's old gun! And Susan still thought that it was Willie Hope!

But, *if* there hadn't been any trouble, and *if* George G. had not been robbed at all, then *what* was he doing, out driving around the country without any breakfast?

And Betty laughed again—She was not quite

herself yet. To think of George G. being in a bad temper because he hadn't had his breakfast! And not more than ten minutes ago she and everybody else in the town, except Jim Smith, had been thinking that George G. was forever done with breakfast—and dinner and supper too!

Betty pinched herself and scolded herself for laughing, and forced herself back to work at her books. But she still giggled excitedly under her breath. George G., saved from a horrible fate by only ten minutes, and grumping about his breakfast!

It was very quiet in the bank.

No one had followed George G. in. The three were alone in the bank. This was as it should be, for Norman Farnsworth had not yet raised the teller's window. But there seemed to be something ominous, something boding, about the stillness, after all the excitement of the morning. It was as though George G. and his bank were living on the ragged rim of a live volcano, and that the lull of calm could mean nothing but the preparation for another blast of alarms.

Norman Farnsworth opened his window slowly, creakily, like a timid man clearing his throat to make some dangerous remark. The window stuck, held an instant, and then went up with a convulsive, nervous bang.

Both Betty and George G. knew exactly what

the noise was. They had heard it before, dozens of times. Norman often fumbled that way in opening the window. Yet George G. in his big office chair and Betty on her high stool both jumped as though they had had been shot at.

People did not form a line in Yaleville for the opening of the bank. They did not like to be seen marching into the bank. They still treasured a homely sort of privacy about when and where they were putting away their savings.

Their fathers and mothers, and they themselves too, used to hide their money in teapots, with the spouts broken off, and in the hairy anatomy of old sofas. They had always had to scout around carefully before going near those places, to be sure that nobody was watching them.

The habit was still strong upon them. When one of the folks went to the bank to put money in, or for the eventful and painful purpose of taking money out, he or she—even more notably she—might be seen to look, with a careless manner but with a swift eye, up and down the street, to be sure that no jealous and thieving eye was watching.

The rush to the bank day before yesterday—while George G. was out calling—had been a freak; a psychological monstrosity, caused by the violent reaction of the drowsy afternoon to Satan's lively imagination and the whirring words of Jim Smith.

Now the people had drifted slowly away from the vicinity of the back stairway where they had seen George G. in the lusty flesh. They talked a little in groups and twos and threes as they gravitated naturally back to their work or to their homes. Those who had come to town with milk drove slowly out the country roads, the horse behind nodding his head into the can on the wagon ahead, as the drivers discussed and argued the matter out at length.

It might seem that all excitement had abated at the sight of George G. There had been no robbery at all. Jim Smith's lying stutter had pretty well fooled them again, and that was all there was about it.

While they were talking to each other, they seemed to agree to laugh the whole business off and forget about it. But when they got away by themselves, there was a nervous scratching of heads and fingering of bonnet strings that boded no good to George G.'s cash balance.

It was all very well to agree with everybody else that George G. was just as safe to-day as he was last week, that there was not the slightest reason for alarm; but when each man and woman got apart, alone, they each began to picture to themselves the worst.

Their fathers and their mothers had been against banks. There were some pretty smart people still living who did not believe in banks.

If only George G. had explained where he had been, and what he had been doing! To-day, as on the day before yesterday, they really knew nothing. Jim Smith's talk was lies from beginning to end. And George G. had said nothing.

At nine o'clock Mr. Richard Sayles, the principal dry goods, hardware, drugs and perfumery, salt fish, millinery, farming implements, segars and candy merchant of the town, thought that he needed to go into the bank. It was not his morning for making his weekly deposit. He was not, in fact, going to deposit money.

On the other hand, so far as he could think, there was no very good reason why he should draw money out of the bank. And it had been his life-long axiom that money was not to be drawn out of bank until the very moment it was needed. Nevertheless, he was going to draw money out of the bank. He did not yet know just what reason he was going to give for drawing money out of the bank—he felt that he ought to give a reason. Yet he was going to draw the money out.

He did not owe anybody, except, of course, his jobbers and his wholesalers, and it was a matter of principle with him never to pay these people until the last moment of the term of credit which they had given him. Nevertheless, he was going to draw his money out of the bank.

He was a genial figure as he came sauntering

to the door of his store, as though to take the air, and stood a moment looking up and down the street. His eye was kind, though sharp. His nose was good, if a little prominent. His whiskers were handsome, not long, but bushy and brown and radiantly beautiful.

Yes, he was going to draw his money out of the bank. But as he came out from the shelter of his own door and stepped leisurely along the sidewalk, you would have thought surely that he was going to walk down the street.

His whole interest, indeed, seemed to be centered on a point quite a distance down the street. You would have thought from his bearing that the bank was the last place in the world in which he was interested. As he came along the sidewalk he raised his hand above his eyes, to shade off the sun, though the sun was not in a position to interfere with his sight, stuck his head forward and seemed to peer eagerly, and even suspiciously, at a point the distance of two or three city blocks down the street. The only place of interest which we could identify, at which he might be staring, was Johile's blacksmith shop. But there was nothing untoward or unseemly in the appearance of the blacksmith shop, to cause it to be the object of such scrutiny.

Yet, Mr. Sayles continued along the sidewalk, hand over eyes, head and neck stretched out, and

a little to one side, after the manner of a very cautious and a very suspicious bird, until he got just a little past the door of the bank.

Here he seemed, unaccountably, to lose his interest in the unknown phenomenon which had attracted his earnest gaze down the street. He dropped his hand from above his eyes, and turned his gaze from the lower part of the street with a shrug of the shoulders that very plainly marked disgust. You would have understood that he thought he saw something which promised to turn out very interesting. And that he had deceived himself grossly. He was evidently disappointed, and somewhat angry.

As he turned, he saw the bank. He looked up, somewhat doubtfully, and recognized it! Why, he was right in front of the bank! Well, since he was here, he thought he would go in.

Once inside the bank, Mr. Sayles showed none of the indirectness which he had evidenced when he was on the sidewalk, and under the public eye.

He walked straight up to Norman Farnsworth's window and said, with the air of a man from whom three teeth were about to be extracted but who knows that it has to be gone through with:

"Norm, I've got three all-fired big bills of goods overdue, and there's men coming right to my store to collect. I'm ashamed to have them come there. But maybe I can make it cheaper, at that. If I get enough money to somewhere near pay them,

and I show 'em the green money—they wouldn't thank me for checks—why, maybe they'll take what I can pay, and call it square.

"I'll have to live off the garden," he continued ruefully, "for the rest of the summer. But I'll sleep better nights."

The last sentence of Mr. Sayles's speech was true. He *would* sleep better nights. The rest was lies, unadulterated, unmodified.

He owed no such money. He would no more have allowed three bill collectors to come to his store than he would have given permission to three cholera victims to die there.

It must not by any means be understood that Mr. Sayles was a man who practiced prevarication. While he was not himself a professing Christian, his wife was; and he was a man whose word in his business, and to his customers, was rigidly truthful. If he told you that a certain pair of shoes was hand sewed, then those were hand-sewn shoes. You could venture your honor upon it. If he announced sugar-cured hams, those hams were sugar cured.

No one had ever thought of calling him Honest Dick Sayles. Of course he was honest. He had always been honest. It would have been superfluous and cheapening to have mentioned it, or to have praised him for something that was simply himself.

Just how Mr. Sayles explained, or condoned, or

accounted for his performance, and his facility this morning, we do not know. We merely record that, while he was giving the foregoing statement of his alleged predicament, he at the same time pulled out a check book and filled in and signed three checks. And so industriously did he work as he talked, that, as a period to his true statement, that he would sleep better at night in the event of the successful outcome of this matter, he had the three checks ready to shove under the grate of the window right in time to the last word.

To Norman Farnsworth's consternation, and to Mr. Sayles' apparent chagrin, the three checks totalled to Mr. Sayles's entire balance, with a difference of just three cents.

"Mighty sorry looking nest egg they're going to leave me!" commented Mr. Saylès, when the state of the account had been revealed to him.

"But, never say die," he philosophized grimly. "I can remember when my balance was less than three cents. It was nothing. And anyway, I'll be out of debt. I won't owe a dollar!"

This last was unnecessary. But Mr. Sayles was, as we have been careful to show, unaccustomed to lying. Like a first drink to a total abstainer, the fiction was going to his head. And, while he could not say that he liked the taste of it, yet it was certainly exciting.

"By Jeeswax! I'm *Ruin*ed!"

This startling announcement broke into the

quiet of the bank while Mr. Sayles was counting the bills which he had received for his three checks.

The announcement should have startled Mr. Sayles and Mr. Farnsworth. But it did not. They had heard it before.

Mr. Jarret Plumb came into the bank at a stride that was almost a free run.

He was evidently excited. But he was always excited. He said that he was ruined. But it was his customary greeting to say that he was ruined.

Neither Mr. Sayles nor Mr. Farnsworth seemed to be at all impressed.

"Seven*teen* hundred dollars!" yelled Mr. Plumb, "for that new saw carriage! And they promised to give me a year's time to pay for it. But I didn't have it in writin'!" he mourned.

"Forgot to have it put in writin'. And now the bloodsuckers are at my throat! They demand their money to-day, if they have to take my flesh and blood for it!"

We do not know whether Mr. Plumb's statements were more true than those of Mr. Sayles had been. Mr. Plumb was always in trouble. So, he may have been in trouble at this time. On the other hand, he was a man whose mind ran first hand to violence, thunder and coarse murder. So he may have been lying altogether. We do not know.

"I *got* to have the money somehow, Norm!"

he said desperately, advancing truculently to the window, where Mr. Sayles hastily shoved his money, half counted, into his pocket, and moved away.

"I don't know what my balance is. I don't care what my balance is. Don't start hemmin' an' hawin' about my balance! I *know* I ain't got that much balance. But here's my note. You've simply *got* to lend me the money. I've got to have it to-day, now, right away!

"Here's the note," he insisted. And he drew from his pocket a slip of paper which proved to be his personal note at three months, all filled out except the amount.

"Your balance is seventeen hundred and two dollars and twenty-eight cents," said Norman Farnsworth severely.

"I don't know what the balance is. I don't care what the balance is. I want seventeen hundred dollars. I've *got* to have seventeen hundred dollars!"

He pulled another paper from the inside pocket of his coat, and flipped it down on the glass underneath Farnsworth's nose.

It was a check signed by Mr. Plumb. It was made out "to cash," and it was for the sum of seventeen hundred, two dollars and twenty-eight cents.

Mr. Plumb got his money and departed on pretty nearly, but not quite, the same run at which

he had come in. He was the busiest man in the town. He owned the water power of the village. He furnished the electric light. And he was a manufacturer of plows and harrows for the surrounding country. As an employer of seven men and three boys, he felt bitterly the growing independence and rapaciousness of the working classes. Every Saturday morning he came to the bank, practically running, to draw the money for his payroll. Before he came near the bank at all, he could be heard declaring to the unlistening world that he was *ruin*ed. The rest of the day, Saturday, he devoted to giving orders and making preparations for the final closing down of his plant, because it was *ruining him.*

If any other man in the village had been seen rushing into the bank and out again after the manner of Mr. Plumb, it would surely have caused excited comment. But Mr. Plumb's alarms and retreats were so frequent that they had long since lost their terror. His going from the bank stirred no more interest than had his coming.

For the moment, there was no one in the bank. Norman Farnsworth reached for a certain blank and wrote some figures on it. He left the cage momentarily, walked to George G.'s door, entered without knocking, and dropped the paper on George G.'s desk. Then he walked straight back to his cage. George G. took up the paper and fingered it absently as he gazed at it.

It read: "CHECKS DRAWN TO CASH $2984.84."

George G. looked a little while at the figures. But it needed no scrutiny to tell him that the money had been drawn out solely because the shrewdest two business men in the town were afraid of *him*. They had simply grabbed their money when they were sure they could get it, because they feared that he, George G. Riceweather, was going to swindle them out of it.

"They think I'm an *embezzler*," said George G. dully; "that I'm getting ready to scoot!

Two days ago, the very idea that anybody could even imagine such a thing would have enraged George G. Now, it hurt him. But anger did not come uppermost in his mind. It was so like the truth that the thought burned him.

"I've always blowed," he said grimly, "that no wholly innocent man was ever condemned. Now it looks as though I was going to see my theory tried out, on myself."

Two milk wagons drove up, one directly behind the other. The two farmers stepped out, each from his own wagon, and touched the sidewalk at about the same instant.

They did not seem to be in a hurry, particularly. But George G. was not deceived.

Those two men were actually racing one another. They did not break into an open bolt for the door of the bank, only because each was afraid to trust his fortune to an open race. So they

watched each other, and walked straight to the door of the bank from different angles.

The smaller of the two men won the contest. For, although they came to the door with no advantage for either and it was the larger man who opened the door, the smaller man, Sam Harris, ducked under the outstretched arm of the taller man, Lon Latham, and popped into the bank with a plain lead.

George G. sat idle no longer. He felt that he knew quite well what was ahead of him. And he arose to meet it with a hardening coolness that was entirely new on him.

He walked into the cashier's cage, sprang the vault door and went down to the safe.

He pulled out the biggest of the wire baskets and tumbled into it all the money of every description that the safe contained: some gold, some silver, and paper money of all sorts.

This he brought up into the cage and stacked it about, where it could be seen from the window. It made a striking show of apparently limitless wealth. But only George G. could have told how thin a wall of money it was. He would gladly have given it all, and more, for a few of the slim packs of bills from his lost reserve.

He knew that he was face to face with ruin and disgrace. He knew that even without any panic or any wild run on his bank, his cash on hand would be exhausted before night by just such

steady cautious withdrawals as those of the two men who had already taken out nearly three thousand dollars in the first fifteen minutes of business, and of such as the two who were now in the bank.

He would put out all the money he had, all out in plain sight, for the effect it might have on some people.

He would take the place at the window himself and jolly with the people, he would give the impression that he had all the money in the world, and that his one enjoyment in life was to hand it out to them.

But in his heart he knew that this would not serve him. He knew that the worst would happen. Some vengeful fatality was pursuing him that would let nothing but the very worst come to him. For three days nothing but the most extreme and fantastic worst had been happening to him, and he looked for nothing else.

The very worst, as George G. thought, was that his bank would be forced to suspend payment temporarily for the lack of ready cash. That was the very worst that George G. could conceive.

If he had known what was really coming to him, he would have wished for death. But it is one of the mercies of life that no misfortune is ever realized in its entirety at any given time in its course.

When George G. had placed the money about in the cashier's cage, not in riotous or blatant dis-

play, but in dignified strategy, to show all, but at the same time to give the impression of illimitable plenty behind what was seen, he went up to his room.

He shaved himself speedily and without conversation, washed, threw open the window, tossed the damp bed clothes in the sunlight, shook and brushed himself, put on a clean collar, and was ready to start a new day.

He went into the next room of his quarters, which was his clothespress and general store room for things that had gotten in his way. He was looking for his old leather grip. If Mrs. Raymond would only leave things out on the floor, where they could be found! thought George G. Not seeing it, he concluded that she must have put it into the wardrobe closet. To his surprise, the door of the closet was locked, though the key was in the door.

That closed and locked door made George G. peevishly angry.

"Confound!" said he bitterly. "I can't keep my safe secure, but that darn fool door has to be locked!"

It was a little thing. It was nothing at all. But George G. was heart-sick with the feeling of loss and disaster and impending calamity.

He found the bag perched up on the closet shelf, impudently sidling up against his sacred high hat, which he had worn only to his father's

funeral, to Norman Farnsworth's wedding, and to a bankers convention.

The hat had always had the shelf alone in decent privacy, bottom up, dignified and immaculate.

George G. snatched down the interloping bag, gave it a cuff or two to remove the dust, and carried it down to the vault.

When he had been down there a minute or two he called up to the cashier, casually, as though he had just thought of it:

"Norman, will you please ask Miss Saunders to step down here? I need her a minute."

Betty came, hurrying. Betty knew that the world was spinning around her head this morning.

George G. was standing by the open door of the safe, out of sight and ear-shot from the cashier's window.

George G. said quietly:

"Betty, this safe was robbed last night of about sixty-five thousand dollars. It was all the money I had, of my own. The rest, all the rest that was here, and more too, belongs to——"

"But——? How——?" faltered Betty.

"I was a fool. I fought two men for half an hour, right here in this vault. When if I hadn't been a fool complete—I see it now—I would have slammed over the trap door, and called for help."

"But how, how could you? You might have been killed!"

"I was a fool, as I say."

"And you're hurt! I *knew* you were!"

"Nothing but a bump on the fool head. Just put me out long enough to let them get away."

"Oh! Can't you do *something?* Chase them? Catch them?"

"I followed what I thought was their trail all night. But I was wrong. A fool again. It's gone," he said gruffly. "The money's gone. I've got to face it. There's not enough money in the bank to last the day out if they keep coming—And I guess they'll keep coming, all right!

"I need your help, Betty. Need it as I've never needed help in my life."

Betty put her hand on his arm gently, saying:

"Show me what to do."

George G. dropped the bag which he had been holding and caught her hand. He tried to draw her to him.

Betty coolly freed her hand and stepped away. She had offered to help him. She had not promised anything else.

George G. hastily grabbed the bag and turned to reach into the safe. He came back with a sheaf of mortgage bonds in his hand.

"These," he said, speaking in a whisper, "are first mortgages. They're as good as gold, until you have to sell them. *Then,* they're worth just what somebody'll give for them, and no more.

"These I've got to try to sell to old man Sessions in Potsdam. He knows about them, and

if he wants to buy them he will probably give me enough money to tide the bank over this day—I'm sure things will take a turn before another day. Either the robbers may be caught, or the people may settle down and trust me. It's this confounded, ding-dang racketing going on all the time that's made them lose their faith in me.

"I don't know, Betty," he went on slowly, as if to himself, "what's coming over me. I know just the position I'm in. It may be ten times worse than it looks. I ought to be scared to death. But I don't seem to care. Last night you hooted at me for thinking too much about money. Now, this morning, I'm stripped of money. I may be a bankrupt before night. And I don't seem to care!"

"Never mind," said Betty, "about what I said last night. Everybody talks silly at night. What is it that I can do?"

"I'll give you a letter," said George G., thus brought back to the business in hand, "asking Mr. Sessions to buy these mortgages, and to give you the money. Then there are these other things." He pulled out another sheaf of papers, thin papers, creased flat.

"These," he said impressively—, and then he turned his eye up sharply to the floor of the cashier's cage. It had occurred to him that Farnsworth was probably listening.

"Go up to your desk, and I'll ring for you.

There was no need to bring you down here, anyway. But I seem to be bound to act like a fool anyway, all round."

"You mustn't talk like that. You're worrying too much, George G.; I'm sure you are," Betty whispered as she stepped to the stairs.

George G. stowed the papers in the bag and went up to his office. As he went from the cage past the glass door leading to the banking floor, he could see that there were several people out there now. They were not standing in line, exactly. But it was only too plain that they were waiting their turn at the window. George G. did not need to be told that they were all drawing out their money, as fast as they could get it.

Betty came, note book in hand as usual, in answer to his ring. The skies might be falling, but Betty was going to maintain the customs of the office.

George was just signing a short letter which he had written out himself. He handed it to Betty, saying:

"You'd better read it; you'll have to talk to him about it. That's about the mortgages, you understand? I'm offering them to him at a heavy sacrifice; because if I don't get the money the bank will have to close.

"I could sell them, those mortgages, right out there in the bank to people that are drawing out their money. But, of course, I wouldn't dare at-

tempt it. Everybody then would know how desperately bad off I am.

"All this, you see, Betty, couldn't have come along at a worse time." He seemed to think that he had to explain it, though it is probable that Betty knew the day-to-day condition of the bank as well as he did. She knew that his loans had been heavy, that everybody was using and needing money these days. She knew that any considerable run on the bank would very quickly take his available cash.

"Now, these other things here are options. They are contracts by which the people of Wilbur's Basin have bound themselves to sell me their land for the big water-power scheme that I've dreamed of ever since I was a boy.

"You can't imagine, Betty, how I've dreamed and worked over that thing. Why, I believe, if I could only be sure of seeing that thing through, I'd be willing to let the whole bank and my home and everything go, just to see that big, round dream come true."

Betty stirred uneasily. It would be too much to say that she tapped her foot impatiently. Anyway, she stood and waited for him to finish.

He switched abruptly to the business in hand.

"*I* cannot go," he said. "I must not be seen leaving this bank to-day. There's been too much ructions already; and if the people get another sudden fright they'll pull this building down. I

could send Farnsworth. But, he's such a fool.

"I'll tell you what I want, Betty. I want to offer the mortgages to Sessions, and I want him to buy them. But, even more than that, I want him to see that I've got these options. I want him to know that I've got them all tight as a drum.

"He's been fighting me on that all the way for three years. But he might turn decent now, when he knows that I'm in trouble. And then again he might turn just the other way.

"Betty," said George G. profoundly, "there's no way in God's world to tell how a man is going to turn."

"Woman, neither," said Betty.

"Oh! If you come to that——!" George G. threw up his hands, high and wide apart, in complete surrender.

"What will I do? What will I say?" insisted Betty specifically.

"You'll send the letter in to him first. Then you'll go in yourself—He'll tell you to come in. Tell him the truth—all of it. Tell him that my bank was robbed in the night. I'd tell him myself, only that I don't dare speak of it over the telephone. Tell him that my reserve is gone, but that I am absolutely solvent," said George G., stiffening his shoulders as he made the declaration.

"What about the options?" Betty was still standing for specific instructions.

"Just show them to him, and say—you'll

know how to say it—say that you think it's a pity that these should have to go out of local hands. Of course, you'll say, the International Power Company will get them in the end, if, if anything should happen to George G., to Mr. Riceweather. That's all you will have to say. He'll offer to buy them then. But you'll say: No, Mr. Riceweather will not sell them. Say that Mr. Riceweather will face a bankruptcy court—— That isn't true but say it anyway—bankruptcy court," he repeated belligerently, "and let the Sheriff sell them to the highest bidder.

"Tell him," said George G., jumping up and raising his fists, "tell him that if I'm going to be executed, then By the Poker of Moses! it's got to be done by the constituted authorities! No, you needn't say that, if you don't want to. You'll know what to say right there, yourself.

"But you can tell him this, finally, Betty. You can say: Mr. Riceweather is a man of his word. You can tell him that if he is fair with me in the money, to-day, for the mortgages; fair, I say, then I will take him as a partner in the Wilbur Basin project. A partner, and he'll know that I mean just what I say, Betty," concluded George G.

"Now, that's all of that," he announced. "Take the satchel"—he pushed the papers into it, closed it, and handed it to Betty—"and I'll have Jim Smith right down here with the car to drive

you to Potsdam. You can be over there and back with the money inside of two hours."

He walked to the door magisterially, to usher Betty out. He believed implicitly in Betty's ability to do anything he told her to do. He was having his own way completely. And he was almost beginning to enjoy himself.

Betty set the satchel down on the floor. She sat down in the small chair beside George G.'s desk and stared at George G. with a look of sorrowing wonder and unwilling conviction.

George G. turned, and met the look. Evidently there was something wrong.

"George G.," said Betty finally, "you *have* gone crazy!" She seemed to announce a conclusion that had been forced on her by the logic of facts.

"Just suppose—Just suppose for a moment that I should be mad enough to think of such a thing. What would happen? Suppose," Betty went on to humor the bent of the crazy man, "that I should go out of this bank carrying that satchel. Would not the whole town know it instantly? Wouldn't it be plain that I was carrying money out of the bank? Did any one ever carry out of a bank a satchel full of anything but money? Why, there'd be a posse organized to follow me and bring me back with the money. Even after they'd searched and found that I had

no money, they would never believe but that you had sent me away with the money, to defraud them, and that I had destroyed it somehow. And then they *would* pull down your bank. I think they'd burn it. And besides, I wouldn't go riding with Jim Smith, anyway. His imagination is too bewildering for a young lady. It isn't safe."

"Old Jim's all right," said George G. argumentatively. "The trouble is," he explained, "people expect Jim Smith to lie. And he does. And then the darn fools go and believe him! But, how are you going to get to Potsdam and back?

"Anyway, I'm *not* going to ride with Jim Smith in your car.

"Go out to my desk, and stay there," she commanded tersely, "two minutes."

George G. mumbled something in protest, but he went out and shut the door.

When he came back, Betty was standing by the desk. The satchel lay in George G.'s chair, open and entirely empty.

George G. came over and peered into the satchel. Then he looked around the desk, and around the office. The mortgages and the options had disappeared completely. Then he stood off and looked Betty up and down.

The papers had been bulky enough to stuff the satchel quite full. George G. walked around and

took a side view of Betty. There was no bulge anywhere.

"Uumm!" said George G.

"I have a very bad toothache," said Betty haughtily. "I am going home.

At the door, she said:

"Dr. Snell, in Potsdam, is my dentist."

Betty walked past the cage to her desk. She put the desk in order, and then she went looking for handkerchiefs. She found three. No one of them looked big enough to suggest any sort of a reputable toothache, but she wadded the three of them together, and thought that they would do.

She put on her hat and went and rattled at the back of the cage to attract Norman Farnsworth.

"Wah—ooh—ake!" said Betty approximately, pointing painfully to the three handkerchiefs which she held against her jaw.

"Toothache!" said Mr. Farnsworth disgustedly. "Well, that's a pretty howdyedo! The heaviest day we ever had! And who's going to strike the balance on the books!"

"Wah—wo—know," said Betty defiantly, "wah—wah—*doncare!*"

Outside the glass door, she met Delia Fairchild face to face.

Betty pointed in dumb tragedy to her face.

"Toothache! Now, ain't that too bad," said Delia. "I'd like to take you right back to the

store and get you something for it. I got some good wintergreen. But I got to stay here. I just got to get some money, to pay a bill."

(If all the bills that had to be paid in Yaleville that day were actually paid, the town would be out of debt for the rest of its normal life.)

Betty glared murderously at her, and Delia wilted.

"I don't know what to do. You know I honest *don't* know what to do, Betty. You know I wouldn't be the one to throw a stone at George G. But there's been such highty-tighty goings on! I *don't* know *what* to do, Betty!" She was appealing with tears in her voice to Betty, for a sign that would tell just what Betty thought of George G. and his situation.

She knew instinctively that Betty would know the truth.

But Betty was flint and adamant. She removed the three handkerchiefs a little away from her cheek, and spoke her mind:

"I hope Jim Smith's robbers come back in the night, to-night, and break into your place and take all the money that you draw out of the bank and tie you up in your own nightgown, and then go off with the money and spend it in riotous living!

"And, I hope they have a glorious time!"

Betty clamped the handkerchiefs up to her cheek again, and stamped out of the bank.

IX

On the old sand road to Potsdam, across the poplar plains, through the quivering silver leaves, rode Betty on a stout, barebacked mare. Her clothes, piece by piece, were the same that she had worn when leaving the bank. From which it is fair to infer that she had not gone to her house at all.

Her attire was the same, regarded and catalogued piece by piece. But there were certain differences in arrangement, made necessary by the exigencies of bareback riding. Her hat, for instance, was pinned securely to her waist, back of her left arm. And there were other differences.

People who saw her through the green and white of the trembling poplar leaves—there were not many people on that road—thought it was just one of the neighbors' long legged children taking a stolen liberty with a pony.

The black mare was a personal friend, whom Betty by good luck, and good guessing, had happened to meet in Petey Leonard's pasture while she was taking a rather round-about way home. The mare had no bridle. But she had a halter

with a leading strap on it. And Betty had simply tied the other end of the strap to the halter on the other side of the mare's nose, which made a bridle of sorts. And the mare was thus harnessed and caparisoned, at least as to the essentials.

Betty covered the eight miles to the outskirts of Potsdam village in somewhat less than an hour. George G.'s automobile could, of course, have brought her to Potsdam in less time, and in greater dignity. But the most important thing had been that she should get away from the bank and out of Yaleville without arousing anybody's suspicions as to where she was going, or why she was going. This she had accomplished completely. Everybody in the village understood that she had gone home; while Miss Susan Wilbur, who alone knew that Betty had not gone home, believed that she was still at the bank.

But Betty now realized that she could not ride through the academic and lady-like precincts of Potsdam in the same fashion which had served for the deserted country road which she had taken.

She pulled the mare down to a slow walk and more or less swarmed around over her back into a posture that might have been called side-saddle, if there had been any saddle. Without a saddle, it was a most precarious and painful position. But Betty was a graduate of the sedate

old Normal College which she was about to pass. And she would have ridden a rack of torture down that street for the sake of proper appearances.

She rode down past the Normal and well down into the center of the village, before she decided that she had suffered enough and that she would not risk life and limb by riding in that ridiculous way another minute.

She turned in to the grass-grown horse sheds of the church which she used to attend—the horse sheds were grass grown because the farmers do not go to church any more—and left the black mare to browse and breathe.

As George G. had foreseen, Betty had no trouble in gaining an interview with Renfrew Sessions. That gentleman was standing on the front steps of his bank, chewing an unlighted cigar.

From her knitting bag, in which she was now carrying the mortgage bonds and the options, Betty took George G.'s letter and handed it to Mr. Sessions, saying:

"From Mr. Riceweather, with a request for your immediate attention."

"From Mr. Riceweather, eh? 'Mediate attention,' eh?" mimicked Mr. Sessions, without removing the cigar.

"He's goin' to get 'mediate attention.' Before night." He stuffed the letter into his pocket and

turned and stumped away into the bank, in a manner to indicate that he wanted to hear no more of Mr. Riceweather, or Betty.

More than anything else, Betty wanted to make a face at him and walk away. She had often seen this stout, bad-mannered old gentleman sitting on a platform, and bowed to and deferred to in the manner reserved for the rich man of a small town. And she had always disliked him on sight. Now she hated him.

She followed him straight into his bank, and when he disappeared into a room that cut off the back of the building, she went on past the business windows of the bank and stood near the door through which he had gone.

She was angry enough so that she forgot the embarrassment of being seen standing at his door. If he did not intend to see her—he had acted as if his mind was made up on that—then, at least, he would have the annoyance of having to come out and drive her away.

He had said that George G. would get immediate attention, and "before night."

What did he mean? That remark had no connection with her errand, she knew. What did he already have in mind about George G.? What did he know? What had he planned? What had he done?

She knew a great deal more than George G.

had ever told her about the silent struggle that had gone on for years between the Riceweathers, father and son, and this crusty, dark, pudgy old man, who looked for all the world like a ferocious pug dog.

She knew that George G. had always fought fair. Sessions had beaten him in the matter of the line of the N. Y. & St. L. Railroad. George G. had won in the Wilbur Basin water-power scheme. So it had gone on for years, a cautious, unspoken duel in the dark, noiseless, and without bluster or threat, yet unceasing, unending as the play of natural forces. These two men could not be at peace with each other. There literally and figuratively was not room in their locality for these two men.

And there would be no end of it, until one or the other should be ruined; or one would become so rich that he would cease to have to think of the other.

But George G. had fought fair, this Betty knew. He kept no spite, no grudge. He fought because the fighting came in the way of business. He had gone ahead and fought his way. If some one, Sessions, for instance, lost; well, that was the luck of the thing, he said. He had never plotted to hurt Sessions. He had never wanted to injure his bank.

Now Betty knew that this man was different.

He wanted to break George G., to crush him, to hurt him, to smash his bank in any way that he could.

He was not a business rival in any of the senses in which George G. understood the term. He was a bitter, scheming enemy. And he already seemed to have an idea in mind, or a plot on foot, in which he already saw George G. the victim.

George G. was not fitted for such a contest as this, thought Betty. See how bravely and foolishly he had gone down alone, without a weapon, into the vault and fought the robbers in the night! It was the thing, just the thing, that an honest, brave man, without cunning, would do. Essentially George G. was honest, honest with himself, rigidly honest with others. And he was without venom. He had no will to injure any one. No, he was not the kind of opponent for this scheming old man in a contest of this sort.

George G. knew this morning that his position was bad. He knew that other people would think it worse than it really was. Yet he had sent her with that letter, which almost proclaimed him to be a bankrupt—sent her here to look for help, from his worst enemy!

Who but a simple-minded man like George G., thought Betty, would have made such a request

as was in that letter, to the very man who could and would use it to hurt him to the full?

Of course, the explanation was that if Sessions had been in the same kind of trouble, and had appealed to George G. for help, why, George G. would have sent it to him at any risk. That was why, she reasoned, George G., who was not at all a fool ordinarily, had thought of this useless and dangerous appeal to Sessions.

But, after all, George G. might not be so foolish.

He was too good looking to be really bright, Betty conceded, but still, he nearly always did the wise thing. In fact, he had *always* done wise things until three days ago, when all these ructions started.

Since he had gone to Miss Dosia's, day before yesterday, he had just hopped from one hot griddle to another, like a mad hen.

True, Betty had enjoyed it all, up to this morning. But she could not now keep from putting it all together:

All the crazy nonsense of yesterday: George G. being presented in the movies, according to Jim Smith: George G. going down the back stairs to Miss Dosia's house and proposing to her to marry Betty herself: George G. hot footing through the orchard and trying to climb the pear tree after Betty: Satan sitting calmly in

his office writing a book about George G., while the whole town howled outside the window. It was all madness together, more unaccountable than if George G. had suddenly taken to drink, or turned dishonest.

Betty knew that for some reason George G. blamed the whole business on Satan. She had heard him muttering to that effect.

Of course, it was true, perhaps, that if Satan had not seen him going down the back stairs in the first place, nothing might have happened. But yet, for herself, she could not see how Satan was to blame.

It had seemed all a merry, hot weather lunacy; until tragedy had come in the night. But Betty was somehow sure that it was all of one piece. If all those crazy things had not happened, she was sure that the terrible robbery would never have occurred. And that George G. would never have had to send her here begging to Renfrew Sessions. Yes, that was just her errand—to *beg* this old man, who she now knew hated George G., to save George G.'s honor and his business life. Until now she had not known how much of a fool's errand it was. And until now she had not thought how very much it meant to her.

Now she was surprised to learn that it was George G.'s money, his bank, his business, that was the dearest thing in the world to her.

She had gotten the habit of blaming George G. for thinking so much about his money.

Now she knew that never in his life—not even last night when he was fighting the robbers for it—never had he thought so much of his money as she did now. Never would he have given his heart for it, as she was ready to do now.

And yet, here she was, standing outside this old man's door, unable to do anything but just stand there!

She wanted to bang at his door, to yell at him and smash the glass panel of the door with her naked hands, and tear things, and yell, and create a terrible scene. And all she could do was just to stand there, cool and quiet and unembarrassed, and shed off coolly and haughtily the curious stares of the bank's clerks and customers.

It seemed to be going to go on forever. But Betty knew that it could not last. Something was going to happen—something *had* to happen before very long!

The door of Renfrew Sessions's private office opened with a yank, and the old man stood in the door and barked at her:

"Come in here."

Betty jumped. And then she laughed. That man-eating old pug dog was trying to frighten her!

She walked in, straight to the chair beside the

old man's desk, and sat down. It was plain that he expected to yell at her, and browbeat her. So, she thought, the more she took the lead herself, the less chance he would have to get started.

"You George G.'s girl?" he snapped, as he came from the door and stood over her.

Betty did not like this. If there was going to be a fight anyway, it might as well begin at once; and she might better begin it herself.

She jumped up, and blazed into Mr. Sessions's face:

"I'm not anybody's girl; and I didn't come here to be bawled at by old men, either. You sit down and say just what is necessary, and not another——"

"Who's an old man?" he yelled back, when he had gotten his first breath.

"Well, *you*'ve lived long enough to have learned common civility." Betty knew that she was acting terribly, but she felt that this was a loud and coarse old man, who would browbeat her, unless she browbeat him. Besides, she wanted to make him angry. She wanted to hear all that he would say. If she could get him thoroughly angry, he would be sure to let out what he had in mind about George G.

"Ain't that a nice way, now, for a young lady to come bally-raggin' into a gentleman's office!" complained Mr. Sessions.

But Betty refused to discuss the matter or to enter into any excuse of herself.

She stood and waited for him to sit down. He did so.

"Which one are you? You the one he pur*pos*ed to? Or'r you the one he's going to marry?"

"He's not going to marry anybody. You know he's been robbed of a great deal of money, and nearly killed in the fight."

"Haw!" roared the old man, with a sort of horse laugh. "Robbed himself! He's fakin' a robbery. And I wouldn't be a bit surprised if you knew all about it!"

"He was robbed," said Betty, "and his reserve money is all gone. If he cannot borrow some cash money from you, now, to-day, before I go back, his bank will have to close. You know just as well as you know anything that it is *not* a fake. Do you think for a moment that if he did not need the money desperately he'd send me here to offer you these mortgages for half what they are worth? Does that look like a fake? Why, he's giving *you,* his worst enemy, the chance of a lifetime to gouge him almost to death! And I suppose that's just what you are preparing to do! I suppose after you've tried to frighten me all you can you'll make some kind of an offer that will just allow him to struggle through—so as to prevent a run on your own bank."

"They can't hurt *me,*" growled the old man. "I've got the cash. *I* didn't rob myself."

"Well, you'll have the run just the same. And maybe you will be hurt more than you think. I know people in Yaleville to-day who'll put money *in* George G.'s bank, instead of taking it out, just because they trust him, just because he's a simple, honest man, and they love him! Would anybody do that for *you?* No. Not a soul. They won't, because they hate you, because they don't believe in you!"

"I don't give a hoot in Bagdad what they do. I've got the money. And I've got that young schemer, George G., just where I want him, too!"

"Where do you want him?"

"No. I ain't just got him where I want him, yet," the old man corrected himself. "Because he's not in jail, yet. And that's where I want him."

"I'd like to *see* you putting him in jail," jeered Betty. She was still keeping her head and doing what she planned to do, goading Mr. Sessions on to talk all that he would, to say what was in his mind.

"Well, you go right back to Yaleville, and wait around till about four o'clock, and you'll see your nice, honest George G. settin' in the little old jail house. That's just what you'll see!"

"You must be doddering a little, aren't you?" suggested Betty. "Don't your folks notice some-

thing? Old people, you know—sometimes——" said Betty kindly, wagging her finger around delicately in the general direction of the upper part of her head.

"Blast your impudence!" yelled Sessions. "How dare you sit up in my face and tell me that I'm no better than an old dote!

"I'll show you! I'll show you!" And he jumped up and began to pound the desk.

Betty jumped up, too, and began to stamp her foot. She would not give him the advantage of standing over her.

"I'll show you! I'll show you and him!" bellowed the old man, banging away on the desk.

"He beat me, did he? Thought he beat Old Sessions on the Wilbur Basin options, did he? He *thought* he did! Well, I was layin' for him. And by the Harry, I've got him, now!"

Betty knew that the old man was now getting down to where his real grudge lay. If she could only keep him going on, she would probably be told some truth presently.

"He *did* beat you, fair and honest," she cut in sharply. "And you know it. And you're only talking a lot of bluff and nonsense now, because you can't bear to admit it."

"*Is that so?* Is *that* so! Well, I'll show you right now. Hand me over them mortgages. Right now!"

"What mortgages?" said Betty, trying for time

in which to understand this. It was a new move, totally unexpected; and she wanted to know what it meant.

"*You* know what mortgages. The mortgages you came here to sell me. He offered them to me in his letter. Well, you're not going to *sell* them to me. You're going to *give* them to me! Hand them over here."

Betty smiled.

"Now, I *know* you're——"

"I am, am I? Well, I'll just show you how doty I am!"

He threw open the breast of his coat, and revealed a big silver star on his vest.

"Do you see *that!*"

It was a deputy sheriff's star. Betty knew it on sight. She knew that he was trying to frighten her, but she did not yet understand why.

"Humph!" said Betty, with just a tilt of her nose.

"Yes. 'Humph.' I'm a deputy sheriff, and you're as cool as they make 'em. But you won't be cool long. George G. is a bankrupt to-day. And he knows it. And you know it.

"And," he said, slowly and judicially, "knowing that he is a bankrupt he has sent here and tried to sell me them mortgages. Tried to swindle his creditors out of them.

"That's a felony, and you know it. And you're an accomplice in it.

"*Now* tell me I'm doty!

"I'm a deputy sheriff, and I subpœna them bonds as evidence. Hand them here."

"Who says George G. is a bankrupt?" Betty fought back.

"*I* say he's a bankrupt. I wired the Superintendent of Banks the other day that Riceweather was insolvent, that day when he had the silly run on him. I knew there was something wrong then. And then this fake robbery came along this morning. He wired it himself to the Bankers Protective Association.

"I got a wire this morning," he went on, "asking me for the facts.

"What did I do? What did I do! I wired right back telling them to send a man right up there, and take charge, and close the bank."

"There you go, wandering again!" said Betty. "You're dreaming now that you're the Superintendent of Banks," she explained sweetly.

"I *am* the Superintendent of Banks, as far as this section goes. What do you think that Department is for if it doesn't protect us against just such rascality as this! The man that is the Second Assistant is a man that *I* had appointed. What I tell him is *right*. The man'll be in Yaleville before three o'clock."

"But what good will that do you?" questioned Betty. "They'll only find out that George G. is short of cash. They could *guess* that from his

own wire. He told that much. And it's all there is to tell or to find out. All they'll really find out is that you talked in your—Well, that you're not quite—*You* know," said Betty, gently twirling her finger at the region above her ear.

"I guess you're right," said the old man, so coolly that Betty *did* then begin to get frightened.

"I must be a *fool,* to be trading words with you. But I can stop that, right here.

"You're under arrest!" he snapped. "Sit right down in that chair, young lady. And hand over them mortgages, and whatever else you came to truck with. I subpœna them for Riceweather's trial."

If he had been content with arresting Betty, no doubt she would have submitted. He was an officer.

But when he showed plainly that what he really wanted to capture was the mortgages and whatever else she might have, then Betty was ready to fight.

"George G. is not a bankrupt at all, so far as you know or I know," she argued. "You *may* be a deputy sheriff, but you're *not* a justice of the peace. You haven't got a warrant to arrest me, and you can't issue one."

"Don't need any warrant. You're caught right here in the act of bringin' them things to me to sell, and George G. is caught by that letter." He pointed to it lying on the desk. "That

letter alone is enough to send him to jail. But you're here with the bonds on your person, and you've come from him. That is conspiracy and it puts just twice the prison time on the offense.

"Now, *that's* what I want—the mortgages. *That's* how doty I am! Now you hand over what you've got in that bag, and *you* can run home about your business. I'll never bother about *you*. I've got his letter. I'll have my man down there this afternoon, and he'll go to jail. But you can go free. I don't make war on women," he said generously.

Betty now realized, for the first time, that she was in difficulties.

She must get back to Yaleville at once, and tell George G. to close his doors right away. He might better do that. It was the only thing to do, to close voluntarily and wait for whatever was going to happen. He should not pay out another dollar now. It was useless, since they were going to sweep down on him anyway. And it was unfair to his friends, who would leave their money with him to the last. George G. must be warned, and at once!

She was not greatly afraid that Sessions would try to hold her. But she knew that he wanted to get his hands on the mortgages, and maybe he suspected that she had some of the precious options, too. She knew that he would do almost anything to get possession of those options, if

only to destroy them. And she felt that she could not get away from here with the securities without at least a struggle.

She did not know what kind of battle it was going to be, but she had already learned the advantage of taking the initiative herself.

Besides, there was George G.'s incriminating letter on the desk.

She vowed in her heart that she would carry that letter out of the room with her, but she did not know how she was going to do it. She concluded that the best way to go was to start going.

She turned unconcernedly and walked toward the door.

Renfrew Sessions ran and pushed ahead of her, and locked the door on her.

"You still think I'm a fool, do you? To let you walk out the door with that evidence, eh!"

"For *mercy* sake!" cried Betty. "Don't touch me! Don't touch me!" And her eyes filled with pretended terror of being the prisoner of a man who had suddenly lost his senses.

She ran back to the desk, and around it, with the evident purpose of getting it between her and the man.

"I'll scream!" she threatened, "I'll scream so that every one in Potsdam can hear me!" And as she went around the desk her bag flew out of her hands and landed on top of the desk, on top of George G.'s letter.

She did give a little sample scream, as she swooped over the desk and grabbed the bag. She came up, holding the bag, and with the letter crushed tightly in her hand and hidden by the bag.

In her right hand she caught a heavy iron paperweight from the desk and swung it wildly about her head.

"*Now,*" she hissed, "*I'm* crazy, too!"

Mr. Sessions had followed her to the desk, but he now backed warily towards the door.

"Stand back," she yelled. "And don't you dare touch me! Now you open that door, or I'll drive this right through the glass! And I'll scream like a fiend!"

"You *are* a fiend," agreed the old man. "You're a hornet. I never saw anything like you. You're a *devil!*"

But he bravely put his own broad body between the door and her threatened swing. He seemed to know that Betty would not throw the iron weight at *him,* and that the glass panel of the door was safe so long as he kept in front of it.

For the instant, Betty was outmaneuvered. She did not want to murder anybody with the paperweight. But she hesitated only for the smallest of instants.

"All right," she said, walking to the window that looked out into the wide alley at the back of the bank. "I can smash the window just as well!"

She swung the iron around her head, aiming at the window.

"And I can yell just as loud out the window!"

And yell she did.

She stood in the middle of the floor, took a full breath and screamed——! The most terrifying and blood-curdling yell that ever waked Potsdam out of its sleep.

The effect was all that she could have desired.

Old Mr. Sessions jumped clear of the floor, and almost did a turn in the air.

Doors banged through the building, upstairs and down. People yelled "Murder!" at each other in the street.

Then you could hear feet running here, there, everywhere. Heavy boots pounding, and spool heels clicking!

Old man Sessions ran away from the door in his excitement.

"Now," said Betty, swinging about again with the iron. "Bang! goes that glass door!

"And I'll yell so loud that your *wife*'ll hear me, clear up at your house!"

The mention of his wife apparently threw panic into the heart of Mr. Sessions. No sooner did he hear her mentioned than he sprang at the door, key in hand, muttering:

"*GodallFriday!* If Clementine hears this, she'll skin me alive!"

He rattled madly at the lock, as though he

himself could think of nothing but to flee desperately from the room.

Betty was at his elbow as he yanked the door wide open. And she walked majestically out through the wide open door. And walked, almost stalked—she *would* have stalked if she had been tall enough—right through a gathering crowd of excited, half frightened people, out through the door of the bank, and turned up Market street toward where she had left the black mare.

X

GEORGE G. stood at the window in the cashier's cage. He had sent Farnsworth back to make up Betty's books, and he had now been engaged through the whole forenoon in the trying business of paying out money. It did not come easy to George G. He was a good fellow, a generous fellow in his way, but the careful handling of money was in his blood.

It always went against his grain to see money going out of the bank, though he had carefully and successfully cultivated that bland aloofness at the window, by which he showed that he was equally pleased with the customer, whether money was coming into or going out of the bank.

He knew that his father before he died had come to feel almost a full ownership of the money that was put into the bank, so that the old gentleman made personal enemies of people who were in the habit of coming to the bank to draw out money; people like Johile, for instance, and Jarret Plumb, who had people working for them and had to meet payrolls.

George G., of course, was not like *that!* He never minded seeing the money go out, for he was

always sure, or almost always, that it would come back bringing with it a nice little increment of other money which it had gathered to it in its travels.

George G. knew his people. When they took their money out of the seclusion of the bank, it was not for air, or exercise, or vain glory. They made the money work.

But this morning it was a tragically different matter. As he counted each dollar down on the glass plate under the window, he felt that he was saying good-by to it forever. And the canny soul within him, that was the soul of generations of careful gatherers of money, was hurt by the continuous, heart-breaking out-go. He was appalled by the thought that before night he might be a bankrupt, and through no fault of his own! He was frightened with the fear of a law which he had always religiously kept and respected. But neither of these specters was so terrible to him as this immediate, hopeless certainty of feeling the money sliding out through his hands, and away from him. It seemed fairly to glide away from him as though it could not run through that window fast enough; while as for the hands of the clock, they simply did not move at all. It would never be three o'clock!

He was sure that at this rate he could not stand the strain of counting out, counting out, counting out money, against the awful slowness of the

clock, until the hour of three should come to break the torture.

But, Betty would be back long before that. Maybe she'd be back before noon, certainly before one o'clock. She could not be longer than one o'clock. And Betty would find help. Betty always brought help!

The actions of the people as they came to the window to-day told the story of the happenings in the village during the last three days.

First, they had been run off their feet and out of their senses, stampeded by the unheard-of, horrifying tale that George G., in the middle of the sleepy afternoon, had absconded down the back stairs and away, with all the money in the world in a big red automobile.

In the end they had laughed themselves sick over that; the idea of George G., the solid, the conservative, the young man who of all young men had never given anybody reason for a shake of the head. That such a thing could be told, and believed, for a minute, about him!

Yet, that thing had had its effect. You cannot stir the depths without bringing up the muddy water.

Then Satan's doings with Miss Dosia and the book, and Jim Smith's projection of George G. upon the movie screen. It had all given a sort of rakish twist to George G.'s reputation. As though the town clock had suddenly taken to

striking out of rotation. It was entirely unbecoming in a banker. It was none of George G.'s fault, people understood. But it was unseemly, at best.

The ridiculous anti-climax of this morning, when George G., rising from the dead, came popping into the assembly with his chief mourner, Jim Smith, riding blithely at his side, had very nearly disgusted everybody.

They did not know whether there was anything wrong with George G.'s bank.

They had all been fooled so many times already!

George G. himself had said that there had been no robbery. And no man, woman or child would say that George G. had ever lied.

If no one of the people of the village had had money on deposit with George G., they would all and severally have sworn, with perfect consciences, that it was all silly nonsense. George G. was as sound as the Republican Party! And as it was, they said it anyhow. But not with easy hearts.

If each individual only had his or her own individual money out of the bank and back safe in the ticking of the sofa, or in the china closet, or in the haymow, then each individual could cheerfully and whole-heartedly have said that it was all silly nonsense—George G. was as safe as the Republican Party!

Thus, the obvious solution was for each individual to get his or her own particular money out of the bank without, of course, disturbing other people's money. "Just let me get *my* money out"—he said, or she said—"and there won't be a single thing to worry about. George G. is as solid as the Republican Party! George G.'s all right. The bank's all right. Everything's all right.

"I need some money right now. Don't I need some money? I do. I need some money to use right away. If I could only get up there to the bank and walk right in and say, just pleasantly like: 'I got to have some money this morning,' just like that, and not say another word to anybody, why everything would be all right."

Everybody in town was determined that there should be no panicky rushing, no disagreeable crowding and fighting, such as had disgraced the town in those terrible minutes the other day.

So they came, singly and, they hoped, secretly; and each had a good and compelling reason for withdrawing money from the bank, a reason entirely unconnected with the condition of the bank, or the soundness of George G.

George G. was in his shirt-sleeves, and perspiring. He did not look like a bank clerk. He did not act like a paying teller. He did not talk like one. But Rome was burning, and George G. thought he might as well fiddle as weep.

"Goin' to take a little trip," announced Ed Green, as a reason for his appearance at the window.

"That's nice, Ed, fine! Just the thing to do in this weather!" agreed George G. heartily. "I wish I could——" He stopped short, remembering that these people were drawing out their money just against that very possibility, that he might be contemplating a trip out of town.

"You'll need some money, Ed," he said hastily. "Any time, you know, *you* make a trip, people right away begin to figure that you won't come back alone."

Mr. Green had been married three times, and being now a widower of a year's standing, and a man of experience and capability in the marrying line, it was proper to wish him good luck on any prospective trip. Because a man is a good fishermen, it does not follow that he brings home fish every time that he goes to the river. He may be only going to get a drink. But—a good fisherman is liable to bring home fish any time. It is a matter of habit and luck combined.

"Can't never tell," said Mr. Green, grinning cheerfully. "Guess I'll need about five hundred dollars."

"Five hundred, right," said George G.

It was the total amount of Mr. Green's capital.

George G., in common with everybody else, knew that it was all the money he had ever had.

It was all the money he ever would have. It was the patrimony of his first wife, and had come to him at her death. He had put the money in the bank, and had drawn the interest regularly, but had never touched the principal. Nor had he ever added to it. His other ventures in matrimony had netted him nothing but experience, and reputation.

"And interest?" said George G.

"Oh, let the interest lay," said Mr. Green, waving his hand at the trifle. "But, then, come to think of it, you might just as well put the interest with it, too. Can't tell," lied Mr. Green unnecessarily, "I might go further'n what I think for."

"You might. That's right," admitted George G.

George G. was naturally quite willing to take the time to figure out the interest. He had the figures from his head to the cent, of course, the instant he ran up the number of days on the calendar. But it was a relief to stop and work it out longhand on a pad.

And so it went on half hour by half hour, interminably dragging on to noon. There was no rush, and there was no break in the small line that shifted constantly up to the window. It was a thing that no tradition or experience in the banking business could account for.

Here was a whole town, as George G. saw it,

convinced that he and his bank had become unsafe overnight. They seemed to have made up their minds that every cent of theirs was to be drawn out, and at once. And yet there was no excitement. It was not a frightened, clamorous mob making a run on him in panic. It was a thoughtful, long-headed people—his own people, who had judged him and had decided that he was not to be trusted.

He had expected a flurry. When he saw that crowd of people at his back stairs this morning he knew that they must have gotten wind of something. And he was fairly sure that there was excitement enough in the air to start some kind of a run. But not this kind of thing.

Why, they came along as though it had all been rehearsed! During the whole morning there had not been at any time more than five people in the bank. Sometimes there had been no more than two. And yet that string of faces at the window had not been broken since nine o'clock.

To George G. there seemed to be something malignant and purposeful about it all. He wished that he could think that it was some one person, some enemy of his, that had sent the word around for the people of Yaleville and the surrounding country to come upon him in this deliberate, calculated way. But he knew that *that* was nonsense. He had nobody to blame but himself.

No. That was wrong. He *did* have some one to blame.

He had Satan to blame!

He could trace the whole miserable business back to Satan. If Satan had not seen him going down the back stairs that first day, none of this would have happened. There would have been none of that disgraceful rush to his bank that day.

Again, Satan and his confounded book! thought George G.

He was even convinced that Satan and his activities were in some way responsible for his robbery. Or, at least, he was sure he would have been wiser and would have had the robbers caught, if it had not been for the previous capers of Satan, which had upset his mind and his good judgment.

For the first time, somebody was taking Samuel Johnson Wright seriously as Satan.

"Somebody knew what they were doing when they named that bird Satan," said George G. to himself. "He looks like a withered cherub. And he never was known to hurt a fly. But—he's *cooked my goose!* That's what he's done."

And then, at five minutes after twelve, Satan came into the bank.

George G. heard him chatting out there, as though nothing had happened!

"That's the coolest villain that the world's

ever seen!" George G. swore as he listened to Satan's cheery voice.

George G. gulped, as Satan appeared at the window brandishing in either hand a roll of bills that, in the language of the irreverent, would choke a horse.

Satan's intentions were of the very best. He knew that, whatever happened, George G. was honest. No good could possibly come from a run on the bank. And much harm might come from it. Therefore, he came forward as a public-spirited townsman, with his money in hand, to restore public confidence.

Satan did not say all of this. He did not, in fact, say any of it. He planked the money down on the glass plate, and remarked:

"Muggy day."

George G., as we have contended from the beginning, was not a brilliant man. He was not now quick enough to appreciate Satan. He did not know whether to be grateful or surly. It might be more of Satan's tricks, coming with a deposit at a time like this!

"Aren't you going on a trip, too? Everybody in the whole dang town seems to be going somewhere to-day."

"Can't," said Satan. "Got to get out my paper in the morning."

George G. glared up from the pile of Satan's

one-dollar bills that he was counting, and lost count. He had forgotten the existence of Satan's *Yaleville Democrat*. Now he remembered that the story of his own doings was to be spread to the vulgar eye of the world to-morrow morning. Satan, he understood, had made a drivelling romance out of the matter.

"Didn't suppose Dosia'd let you publish it now," said George G.

"Publishing is the way I make my living," said Satan, laconically.

This was not true, because if Satan had not inherited his Aunt Almira's property he would, in the natural course of things, have starved to death on his publishing business.

But George G. let it pass.

He had referred to the story of himself and Miss Dosia. Satan had referred to his newspaper, in general.

Satan's demonstration of confidence in George G., like most of the things that Satan had been doing in this town for forty years, accomplished nothing. It was only Satan. Nobody ever paid any serious attention to what he did. Those who saw it, and those who heard of it, said that he was a fool to do it. And that was the end of that.

Tinney Nelson came right behind him to the window, and took out not only the five hundred and odd dollars that Satan had deposited, but five hundred other dollars with them.

The mill ground on. An inexorable, steady, quiet stream of people flowed on past the window, never crowding, never rushing, but emotionless as time, and as fatal to George G. as death itself.

He saw his doom. He knew that he could not last. He would have used his telephone, for he was beyond fear or shame. But he knew that it was useless. There was no one in the County now on whom he could call for help.

And Betty had failed. Of that he was now suddenly and unaccountably sure. He did not blame her. He did not even blame himself for sending her, when he should have gone in person.

No one was to blame. The thing had come upon him like lightning out of the sky, and he was standing stark and alone to face it. In another hour he would be the thing that would stir his father in the grave, a bankrupt.

He stopped talking. He made no effort to slow the tide of money that was running away through his hands. People came and demanded their money. And he gave it to them. It was theirs. And in another hour he would be a bankrupt—an embezzler—as it might be shown. In any case, a man worse than dead. It did not matter now. Minute after minute the clock ticked the time away, and the minutes ticked the money away; the money that meant life and death to him. And George G. thought that he did not care.

There was a revolver up there in his bedroom. George G. thought of that. But it was only with disgust, for the traditional, melodramatic, cowardly, *common* ending of such situations as this that he was now facing.

A healthy man does not do that thing. And George G., except that he was weak with hunger, was healthy.

And then he felt a sharp tug at the loose shoulder of his shirt. He wondered if it was the hand of the law. He did not care, much. As well now as an hour from now, he thought; and he turned slowly.

Betty, white faced and desperate looking, was standing in the door of the cage, saying:

"Drop the window, *now!*"

George G. reached back and touched a catch. The dropping of the window meant virtually the end of the bank as a living institution. But when Betty spoke like that, she was to be obeyed.

The window fell with a sharp bang that sounded through the bank like a shot.

Betty pulled George G. out of the cage, and led him to the door of his office.

"You must get away. Go away. Right away. Quick!"

"Where, away?" asked George G. stupidly. "What for?"

"It doesn't matter where. Only get away from here, *now!* Before they come!"

"Who's coming? What for?"

"Oh, George G., they're coming here, coming here to get you. *Officers!* Just as if you were a—a—Coming here to arrest you. Go right up and get into your automobile, and *run!*"

She was dancing, now in front of him, now at his side, plucking at his arm, like an impatient, tempestuous child. But George G. knew that this was not a child. It was a woman, who was in mortal fear, for him.

"But, Golly! Betty, I can't just run and take a jump out of the window. You'll have to tell me something about who, and what, and why. Just tell me *who's* coming, and I'll know what to look for."

He caught Betty by the wrist and forced her to sit down in his chair. "The bank is closed," he said, "and so far as I can see it might as well stay closed. So, you can take your time and tell me. There's plenty of time, now. There's nothing *but* time."

"But there isn't any time!" said Betty, jumping up again. "There isn't any time at all. You'll have to get right out of town, and stay away. Mr. Sessions has men on the way here now. They may walk in here any minute. They are coming here practically under his orders to investigate, and to close your bank.

"Well, that's all right, Betty. The bank's closed now, isn't it? I'm going out to put up a

notice in a minute, he added, listening to some one tapping on the closed window out at the cage. "And there's nothing here to investigate. You know as much as I do."

"It isn't that," said Betty. "*That's* nothing at all. Mr. Sessions has gotten a warrant for you by this time. He says it was a felony for you to try to sell those mortgages, when you knew you were going to have to close. He'll get the warrant. And he'll send a deputy sheriff here before night to take you to jail. It won't be lawful, of course you can fight that and get out. But, anyway, just as sure as you stay here, he'll have you in jail before night."

"But, what's the matter with him? What good will it do him? He knows he can't keep me in jail on a fluke like that!"

"That doesn't matter," said Betty. "He hates you enough so he doesn't care about that. He wants just the satisfaction of seeing you go to jail, and knowing that *he* sent you there. You can't understand that, of course. You're not that kind of man. You wouldn't believe it. But it's true, and you'll see one of the deputy sheriffs here before night to take you to jail."

"Well, what of it? Do you think I'm going to be scared away like a crook, just for a scheme like that?"

"But, I don't want to see you go to jail! Not

even if it was only for a half an hour! I couldn't bear it, George G., I'd be thinking of it all my life!"

"Nonsense, Betty, good men have gone to jail, and it didn't hurt them. Why, don't you see, if I ran away now, there *would* be something for people to say! I tell you, I've got to stay right here where I am, and see this thing through."

"I don't care!" wailed Betty. "I don't care *what* they say! I don't want to see you go to jail! They'll put handcuffs on you! And lead you like an animal! Oh, George G., I never, never could get that out of my heart! Please, please, run up and get your car, and go away! You can go now. You have a perfect right to go, now, anywhere you want to go. But, once they come here, then, if you try to go, you'll be a fugitive from justice!"

"Yes, but I won't try to go, now or any other time. Why should I?"

"You will, George G., I know you will! You'd never sit down and mope like—like a dumb animal in a pen! You'd fret your heart out, and then you'd try to get away in the end. Please, George G., I never pleaded with you for anything before!"

"I don't want you to plead! You'd never have to plead with me for anything, Betty. But—Golly! I don't understand this. I never heard

of *you* running away from trouble. Tell me the truth now. If you yourself were in my place, would *you* run away? Honest Injun, now?"

Betty was silent.

"I knew it!" said George G. "I knew it!

"You wouldn't run away, any more than I would. I know you, Betty. The trouble with you is that you think that—except for my money, which I haven't got now—I have just about the brains and stamina of a woodchuck."

"I do not," said Betty warmly. "I always said, to myself, that I'd—like you better, if you didn't have money. And I know," she hurried on, away from a dangerous admission, "how you ran down and fought the robbers *without even a stick!* And that's just what I'm afraid of. They'll come here and insult you and try to abuse you. And then you'll lash out mad, and—and something terrible will happen. Please, George G.!" She caught him boldly by the arm, and began to tug him bodily to the door.

It may be that George G. had been waiting for this. Possibly he had been waiting years for just this. He had always been afraid of Betty. Even his mad pursuit of her in the orchard last evening had been mostly bravado. If she had stopped suddenly and waited for him, probably he would not have dared touch her.

But to-day George G. was reckless. Betty was very near and very dear. And the heady fire of

her excitement, and her fear for him, caught and blazed up in him.

He swung forward quickly, threw his arms around Betty's waist, and crushed her to him.

But Betty was not caught altogether helpless. She doubled her forearm up under George G.'s chin and held it braced, so that George G., who had thought himself to be at the very point and glorious climax of kissing Betty, found that the harder he pulled Betty to him, the farther back his own head was pushed. It was a position where enterprise, violence and main strength could do nothing but defeat themselves.

"Please, Betty!" he pleaded. Apparently his meaning was clear, to himself, and to Betty.

"Will you go away, then?" Betty bargained.

"Sure!" said George G., readily and greedily.

Betty pushed herself away and stood, hesitating. But George G. turned suddenly, and uncomfortably, honest.

"No, Betty," he declared, "I can't say it. I don't want to lie to you, not even for kisses! I will not go away. You don't know how I feel about this. Why, I wouldn't run away from here, not even if you would come with me. I wouldn't, Betty, no, not even if you wanted to go!"

"Oh, no!" said Betty. "Oh, no, of course not!" The idea was novel, and certainly interesting. But Betty seemed to consider it only academically.

She walked toward the big front window of George G.'s office, and looked out past the edge of the shade.

"I'd be awfully nice to you, though," she said, a little regretfully, as though she was mildly sorry that George G. was so rigorous.

"*Eh?* What's that?" George G. leaped a foot or two.

"But, why argue about it?" said Betty, looking out the window. "We couldn't go now, anyway. The officers are at the door."

George G. walked up to the window and yanked the shade aside.

He looked a moment, and then said quietly:

"It's come."

Two men stepped from an automobile and walked quickly into the bank. Quick as they were, George G. was out through the office and ready to shake hands with them in the middle of the banking floor.

They did not have a chance to speak to any of the excited people in the bank. George G. brought them right into his office.

Betty started away toward her desk, but George G. called her back and insisted that she stay with them.

"Betty," he said, "allow me to introduce Mr. Claver. And *this* is Mr. Trait. Miss Saunders, gentlemen, is my future wife, and she knows the books here. She knows more about the running

of things here than I do. If you really want to find out about something that isn't clear to you, ask her."

Betty, thus trapped, without even a chance to say "Humph!" was forced to sit down and wait for orders.

"These gentlemen, Betty," said George G., "have come to—to report on the condition of the bank. If you'll be good enough to show them the books, and answer any questions, and——"

"Have you closed?" asked Mr. Claver.

"Certainly not," snapped George G. "I wired your Department simply to inform you about the robbery."

"Might as well close," decided Mr. Claver. He was a tall, thin, crooked man, with no top on his head. That is, his head sloped back in a straight line from the point of the jaw to the very tip of his head. And the back of his head sloped forward, right up from the nape of his neck. So that his head was either a ridge, or a peak, according to the viewpoint.

"You mean, you've been sent here to close me up. No matter what my condition is!" said George G. belligerently.

"It might take several days to find out just how things stand," said Mr. Claver. "The public's got to be protected in the meantime."

"Protected from *me?*" asked George G.

"My instructions are to take charge, and use

my judgment. I think the bank had better be closed now. Make out a notice and post it."

"Do it yourself," said George G. "That's what you were sent here for."

"Mr. Trait," said Mr. Claver, "you go out and clear those people out of the bank and put the card on the door."

Mr. Trait went out to do as he was told. But the loud voices that at once rose in protest from the outer officer of the bank made it plain that his task was easier in the ordering than in the execution.

It was done, however, as the three sat silent in the front office. They could hear the people being slowly pushed and argued through the door, and in the end George G. heard his own door banged and locked by a strange hand.

The sound went through him with a chill, as if he had thought of some one stamping on his grave, or upon his father's grave. *Now,* he was a bankrupt! As for going to jail, it did not matter much either way.

"Do you want the books brought in here," inquired George G., "or will you go through them out in the back office? The man's working on them out there now."

"Working on them now? After the bank's already gone out of business?" stormed Mr. Claver. "Whereabouts? This is interesting!"

Betty saw George G.'s face turn a violent and

a vivid red. She could not tell whether the man, Claver, was deliberately trying to bait George G. into anger, or was just meanly constituted so that he could not refrain from insulting any one who was temporarily in his power.

George G. did not say a word—Betty did not expect that he would. He always went tongue-tied when really angry. He walked out, leading the way to the back office. When there, he pointed to Farnsworth, and waved his hand at the books. Then he marched Betty back to the front office. He would not let her help go over the books.

When they were alone again, George G. said:

"Now, please don't say 'I told you so.' "

"Not at all!" disclaimed Betty. "I'm glad now that you didn't go. I was crazy for a little while."

"If you had only suggested going with me a little while sooner!" said George G. fretfully.

"You needn't pick me up on that," returned Betty coolly. "I had seen the officers at the door before I said it."

"Oh," said George G., and the expression sounded a good deal like the air going out of a cushion.

We have at no time tried to prove that George G. was a very brilliant man.

"You'll want to write some letters," suggested Betty.

"What for? What difference does it make

now whether they are written or not? I want to talk to *you.*"

"Oh, yes, it does!" said Betty firmly. "You never before needed to care how you treated your friends. Now, you've got to write a personal letter to every man who likes you and trusts you. And you've got to tell them the simple truth about this. If they hear from you, they will believe you. If they don't hear from you, then, no matter how much they like you, they will believe some of the worst that they hear from others."

"I suppose you're right, Betty; I know you are. But I have no heart for it. I honestly don't care a—a—what they think about it."

"I suppose you don't, to-day, George G.; but to-morrow you will care. And the day after to-morrow you will care. And every day after that for the next forty years, or so, you will care more and more. So now is the time you must speak straight out, before people's first impressions begin to harden. There are maybe twenty-five men, maybe fifty men, whose judgment really forms the opinion of all the people that count. They all know you, or know of you. They would be glad to know your side of this. They have a right to hear it. And they ought to hear it from you."

She made him dictate letter after letter, to men of his acquaintance, stating honestly and simply just what had happened to him. He asked

no help—though these were men who had money and who might have helped him. He made no appeal and no apology. There was none to be made. And Betty was so pleased, and so proud of the manly and dignified way in which he talked to men that she forgot all the troubles that she had foreseen. She was sure that George G. had only to state his case in his own words, in his own way, and everything was all right. Unaccountably, her heart began to sing. And then it began to dance.

George G. must have felt her happiness. He took a bound of courage, stopped suddenly—He had been walking up and down dictating,—swooped swiftly upon the happy, busy, unsuspecting Betty—who didn't know why her heart was dancing—and before she had time to catch a short breath, he had swung her from her chair and full into his arms.

Betty fought, and nearly kicked herself free. But George G. kissed her. He kissed her on the top of the head. Nevertheless, he kissed her. That was the main thing.

And just then another automobile pulled up and stopped with a bang in front of the bank door. Again two men got out and started for the entrance to the bank. A crowd had gathered on the sidewalk since the locking of the doors. The two men pushed their way to the door.

"Oh, Oh, Oooh!" Betty burst out crying wildly.

"Why didn't I make you go? Why didn't I *make* you go? They've come to take you to jail! I won't let them. I *won't* see you go!"

And Betty, who only a moment before had battled her way out of George G.'s arms, now ran to him and threw her arms up around his neck and hugged him desperately to her.

Then George G. said the first clever thing on record for him.

"Gee!" said he, to the back of Betty's ear. "I want to go to jail every day!"

The two newly arrived officers hammered hard on the door of the bank, and announced that they were in a great hurry to see George G.

Practically the entire population of Yaleville was now gathered on the sidewalk and in the street in front of the bank. The people had forgotten their restraint, self-imposed in the first place; and when they heard that George G. was virtually a prisoner in his own bank no man or woman could be kept by any means whatever from coming to see this thing in person. It was the climax to all that had gone before through the week. It was as exciting as the time when the river came up over the bridge.

The banging upon the door brought Mr. Trait to the front of the bank. The two men, supported and abetted by the crowd, demanded the opening of the door, and the person of George G. Mr. Claver was called from the books in the rear office.

The two men on the outside shouted through the door that they were deputies of the Sheriff, and that they had a warrant for George G. on which they proposed to take him to jail at once.

Mr. Claver refused to listen. George G. in person and the bank were bodily under his hand. He did not propose to have George G. carted away to Canton. And, besides, if the Sheriff should carry George G. away, then he was quite capable of demanding that the bank be turned over to him. And *that* to Mr. Claver was unthinkable.

Mr. Claver refused to open the door. He refused to deliver the prisoner. He explained through the door, loudly and to the great satisfaction of the people of Yaleville, that the authority of his Department over George G. and the bank was far beyond that of the Sheriff, because it was his particular business to protect the money of the people.

The Deputy Sheriff, on the other side of the door, pulled out and read a warrant for the arrest of George G.

Mr. Claver wavered. He opened the door to the two representatives of the rival branch of the law. But that did not mean that he was ready to turn his charge over to the Sheriff's office.

They, the deputy sheriffs and Mr. Claver and Mr. Trait, stood inside the door, after it had been locked again, and argued the matter to the

edification of the people outside, who had a good view of the whole proceedings. Finally the deputy sheriff in command, a man from Potsdam, named Titus, went to the public telephone booth in the bank and called a number in Potsdam. After talking a moment with his party, he called Mr. Claver to the phone. The people outside watched this pantomimic perfomance eagerly. They could hear nothing at all, so it was fair to presume that what was being said was highly interesting.

When Mr. Claver left the phone, the argument between himself and the deputies broke out afresh. Unregenerate people in the crowd felt certain that the words were profane, and they hoped that they would come to blows.

Nobody could get the exact lines of the argument. But it was understood that the deputy sheriffs wanted to carry George G. off to prison at once; while the officers of the Banking Department insisted on keeping him in the bank during the time when they were examining it and, of course, him.

However, Mr. Claver must have heard something from Potsdam, over the telephone, that weakened him. He admitted that the Sheriff's office should have physical custody of the prisoner. But he must not be taken away from the village, where the Banking Department must have access to him at all times of the day.

At this impasse, Mr. Titus unlocked the front door and came out upon the sidewalk. He was looking for consultation with the local representative of the penal law. Jeb Stevens produced himself instantly. He was a village constable, by heredity, preordination, and the consent of the governed. He could be picked out of the densest crowd.

"What kind of a jail you got here?" inquired Mr. Titus.

"Best jail in the County, outside o' Canton, an' the city of Oggensburg!" boasted Mr. Stevens out of his professional and civic pride.

"Whereabouts is it?" inquired Mr. Titus, looking around as though he thought such a paragon of a jail ought to show in the foreground.

"Right over here back o' my house," said the Constable, and he started off leading the way through the crowd. Mr. Titus followed, and so did most of the inhabitants of Yaleville, to inspect the jail.

When they came back, the Constable was admitted to the bank with Mr. Titus.

"The jail's ready," announced Mr. Titus to the bank inspectors. "I'll leave him there in charge of my assistant, Mr. Larue, and the Constable. They'll both hold the keys, and they'll both be responsible. And you can see him, or you can bring him over here, in their custody,

whenever you think you need him. My warrant is satisfied, when he's in the hands of the Sheriff's office. Where's the prisoner?"

"He's in there, writing letters to his stenographer," said Mr. Claver.

"Writin' letters! Why, I tell you it's against prison rules! Constitutionally, that man's in jail already!" said Mr. Titus severely. "You shouldn't 've allowed it."

"Well, he's only dictating them to the stenographer," excused Mr. Claver. "And so long as they're not going to be mailed—" His explanation trailed off weakly on the way to George G.'s door.

He opened the door quickly, and without knocking; but he was not too quick for Betty. Whatever she may have been doing before, Betty was now sitting demurely in her own chair. And as the door swung wide open she began to read over aloud what, presumably, George G. had just been dictating.

That she was holding the notebook upside down, was nobody's business.

George G. was standing in the middle of the floor, smiling happily. Even the brusque crowding of five men into his private office did not seem to disturb his happy humor.

"You're under arrest, Mr. Riceweather," said Titus. "I'll read the warrant."

"Never mind, I'll take your word for it. Fact

is, gentlemen," said George G. blandly, "I've just been engaged to be married. Miss Betty Saunders, here," he introduced Betty with a wave of his hand, "has made me very happy. And I don't want to listen to anything else."

"I've got to put you in jail here until such time as the inspectors finish their work."

Betty jumped up and started to put herself in front of George G. But George G. was untroubled.

"Anything you like, only don't start spouting legal documents at me. I wouldn't listen, and everybody here, except Jeb Stevens, knows it's a fake, anyway. So what's the use?"

Titus pulled a set of handcuffs from the side pocket of his coat, and advanced toward George G. Betty gave a little choking scream, and George G., looking down, saw the sickened terror in her face.

He shifted one quick light step behind her, caught her elbows in his big hands, pressed them against her sides firmly and lifted her from her feet. He swung her around carefully past the corner of the big desk and stood her like a doll in the lee of it.

Then he turned on Titus with a bound.

"You yellow-eyed bullying tout, you!" he roared. "How dare you shake those things around here! Scaring women, that's your size! Now you just put those things back in your pocket,

or by the Jumping Jimbell I'll ram 'em down your throat!"

If the truth were to be told, I think George G. wanted to fight. I think he almost hoped that Titus would try to put the handcuffs on him. He had the taste of unfinished battle in his blood from last night. Then, however, he had not been really angry. Now, he was fighting mad. Then there had been only two men, against whom he had no particular feeling except to protect his money from them. Now, there were five men whom he hated, generally and specifically, and they had tried to scare him before Betty!

Yes. I am sure that George G. wanted to fight, and to smash things and men.

"There's five of you," he bellowed, "but I don't want any better fun than to crunch every bone in your whole blasted bodies!"

He shook his big fist until it vibrated directly under Titus' nose. "I'll go with you, wherever you say, because I suppose your warrant is legal, technically. But, by the Poker of Moses! if any one of you lays a hand on me, or so much as lets a handcuff rattle around here, I'll rip the lining out of the whole five of you!"

And Betty, I think Betty hoped that he was going to do just what he promised.

But Mr. Titus knew that, in the long run, he would have nothing to gain by trouble with George G. And, too, George G. was a big man, and in

his present mood he looked tough. So Mr. Titus, though George G.'s fist was shaken right up in his face, where he might easily have slipped a handcuff to the wrist, resisted the temptation. He slid the handcuffs back into his pocket.

"Well, you'll have to come with me, now." Mr. Titus started, leading the way to the door. He seemed to have some doubt as to whether George G. would actually follow him.

George G. did.

Titus went out, George G. behind him, with Jeb Stevens and Larue bringing up a smart rear.

The sight of George G. being marched out, a prisoner, brought the crowd jostling up about the bank in almost desperate curiosity. Adelia Fairchild screamed. Johile Jenkins, being short and not patient, wanted to get a better view; so he moved forward violently. In order that Johile might move, it was necessary that about four other people should be displaced. Johile moved, and the four others were promptly upset. A boy was knocked down yelling, right under the feet of the officers.

"He's being tramped to death!" screeched a woman. Then everybody yelled, and jammed forward.

Mr. Titus must have thought that he was being mobbed, that a riot had been purposely organized to rescue his prisoner from him.

He foolishly reached into his back pocket and pulled out a pistol.

George G., who was behind Titus, reached around, grabbed the hand that held the pistol, and gave the arm such a twist that he nearly broke it.

"You ring-tailed fool!" remarked George G. "What do you think you're doing?" And he took the pistol from the limp hand of the officer and threw it across the street and clear down the river bank.

"Now, folks," shouted George G., "just get back a little, and let us get through. I've got to go to jail."

"What for?" shouted Johile.

Then George G. made a speech. The first speech of a hitherto innocent life.

It was not a long speech. But, to this day, George G. has to go away by himself somewhere and stick his tongue in his cheek, when he thinks of that speech.

"My friends," said he, striking that subdued, but dignified, note, proper to a righteous man on his way to the undeserved coop, "this morning you heard me say that I had not been robbed, that there had been no robbery. Well, I lied. I told that lie, because I thought it was best. I knew that you would lose, and I would lose, by a run on the bank. I tried to forestall it by a lie. And,

of course, I failed. I suppose a lie always fails," he moralized.

"But it was not altogether a lie. I was not thinking of *my* money. I was thinking of *your* money."

Those of the people who had gotten their money out of the bank during the morning listened delightedly. They were ready to applaud. They never knew that George G. was such a good speaker!

Mr. Titus made a tentative tug at George G.'s sleeve, as though to remind him that the jail was waiting. But George G. shook him off fiercely. A man's first speech is a terrible thing.

"I was thinking of *your* money," he continued, "because—and now I want you to get this right—because not one penny of *your* money was taken. So far as *you* were concerned, there *was* no robbery. Not a penny of *your* money is gone!" (Applause.)

"But there was a robbery, a thumping big robbery. I fought two men, down in my vault until I got knocked in the head." He pointed to the corner of his forehead, and there was the scar and the bruise. And again he got a cheer.

"I suppose they left me for dead. But first they robbed me of over sixty thousand dollars. Sixty thousand dollars!" he repeated, smacking the shut fist of one hand into the open palm of

the other. "It was my entire reserve. It was all, actually *all* of my money. But they did not get any of yours! They took everything I had, but everything they took was *mine!* (Applause, hearty and generous.)

"And now," he resumed, "an enemy, a man in Potsdam who hates me, a man who wants to put me out of his way, has set the Banking Department after me, because he has learned that my reserve is gone. He has faked up a case with the Sheriff's office, and he has got a warrant out for me. And he has sent this man Titus here, a hired man of his, to put me in the jail. His warrant is legal, at least it is issued by a judge. So there is no way to oppose it except the legal way. I have to go to jail until I get proper counsel and advice. But nothing has hurt the bank. Your money is absolutely safe. These inspectors that are here from the Banking Department will find every dollar of yours invested in mortgages and securities that are as sound as gold dollars."

George G., like many another speaker, having once gotten started, did not want to, or did not know how to stop.

"Miss Saunders," said he proudly, in a sort of semi-final, "the young lady who has just shown faith enough in me to promise to marry me, will take charge of my personal business—if I have any.

"That's all," he concluded, with a gruff break in his voice that was his first show of emotion. "I've lost my fortune. So I'm going to jail.

"Your money, however, is safe."

He turned roughly, and started nudging the Deputy Sheriff through the crowd.

"Why didn't you tell the people this morning?" shouted several from the now sympathetic crowd.

But George G. only shook his head and bumped along on his way.

Out in the middle of the street, on the outskirts of the crowd, he brushed past Satan, who was standing by himself, absorbedly writing something —probably George G.'s speech—on a loose roll of uncalled for advertising posters.

"Satan," hissed George G., as he passed, "you ought to come with me, and finish that damned book in jail! And you ought to get *life* to do it in!"

That book was still sticking in George G.'s craw, as the cause of all his troubles.

Satan looked up blinking after George G., who was, after all, his friend, and a good friend, too.

And Satan sincerely wished that he had elected to hoe the corn in the first place.

XI

BETTY was lying face down in the hammock, under the self-same pines, where only last evening in the gloaming she had sung that silly summer song with Willie Hope.

Who could believe that that was slightly less than twenty-four hours ago? Betty could not believe it. Some one must have stopped the count of time, and let her live on through years and decades of experiences, in what they called a single day.

Then, at that time, she had been just a young girl, with two, or maybe three, tentative, well-managed beaux, as is fitting. Every girl should have them.

What for? To keep them away from some other girl, of course. Heaven knows they are no use for anything else!

And here was Betty now, a broken-hearted woman, whose life had all been lived in those short hours. Her will was gone. Her heart had leaped into love for George G., swiftly as a shooting flame. She hungered now for the mere sight of him. She wanted to be near him, just to look at him, just to watch the sturdy set of his

jaw. As though she had not been looking at him for years. Her heart was as abject now to worship him as last night—so long ago!—she had been pert in teasing and flouting him.

And now George G. was sitting over there, alone, in the dirt, in the place of petty thieves and drunks!

"Oh, *oo, oooo!*" wept Betty into the pillow of the hammock. "If it was only a re*spect*able jail! It's nothing—nothing but a—a *barn!*"

She raised her head to look down at the little old black-looking shack across the river behind the Constable's house, where George G. lay humiliated in the dust of crime.

But out of the very raising of her head there came a thought, an idea, a determination.

George G. should not, must not, spend a night in that place!

To go there, as George G. had gone, submitting to the law, had seemed to Betty as the only thing to be done. But that he should *stay* there, lying down to sleep in the filth and grime of the associations; *that* was the deadly thing. *That* must not be!

A swift, running fire kindled up behind Betty's eyes, and dried them instantly.

She got up and went into the house.

A few minutes later she was walking along the sidewalk in front of Sayles's store.

Four men were sitting comfortably wedged on

the step formed by the inset of Mr. Sayles's door. They were not talking. They were too lazy and content. They had said everything, or heard everything, that was to be said. They were in that ideal philosophic state in which they willed nothing, anticipated nothing. Neither did they fear anything, except that one of Mr. Sayles's customers—a woman of course—might come along and force them to move.

Six men sat on the edge of the high sidewalk, their feet dangling off to the roadway. Of these Petey Leonard was whittling a stick. But he was from the North of Ireland, and naturally obstreperous. The others were doing nothing at all except to breathe gently and stare stupidly out across the street and the river.

Four other men sat on the narrow seat formed by the frame of George G.'s door.

"How old'll George G. be?" inquired Petey Leonard of John Gibson. They were in the line on the outer edge of the sidewalk. But the other two groups were near enough for general argument.

Petey Leonard did not care a hoot about how old George G. was; but he knew that John Gibson would answer. And that the answer would probably be a lie. At least it would be wrong. It would start an argument.

"Born the year I went to Cobalt," squeaked

John Gibson. "That'd make him risin' thirty-eight."

Everybody within hearing knew that John didn't know what year it was he went to Cobalt. Upon his own previous testimonies it could be proven that it was anywhere from twenty-five to forty years ago. Besides, Johile had it from a cousin in Canada that John Gibson had worked all that year when he was away, for a man over in Ontario, hardly thirty miles from home. To this it might be added that at that time, as a place to go to, Cobalt was not in existence. And from all this it might have been said that John Gibson was a liar. But nobody wanted to pick a fight.

"Twenty-eight," said some one, from Mr. Sayles's doorstep.

"Yaah!" said some jealous man at the end of the line on the sidewalk. "If he was hangin' since he was twenty-eight, he wouldn't be the shape he is!"

This remark was in bad taste. Everybody thought so. When a man is already in jail, it is nothing less than indelicate to mention hanging. There was a rebuking silence.

"Thu . . . Thu . . . Thu . . . Th . . . *Thirty* next Sunday."

Jim Smith spoke from George G.'s doorstep. He knew that George G.'s age was not thirty,

and that his birthday was not next Sunday. He had a good memory, and if he had tried he could probably have told George G.'s age pretty accurately. But, who wants details?

Jim Smith was a literary artist. "Thirty next Sunday" it had the punch. The flare. It would stick. Men could remember and repeat it. Men told it to their wives that night. And when the wives said that it wasn't so, the men fought back and argued. And before they went to sleep the men convinced themselves, but not their wives, that Jim Smith was right.

Then Betty came stepping along, nodding sedately right and left, as different men made little jabs with their hats, until she came directly in front of George G.'s door. The men thought she looked at the door.

She looked Jim Smith straight in the eye. I do not say that she winked. I do not even believe that she nodded her head in any particular direction at all. It was but an instant's hesitation, at the point where every day she turned in to work. Then she walked on, turned the corner, and disappeared up the street that ran north.

Satan once said, in general defense of Jim Smith, that at least he was alive.

He now made no sign of having received any communication whatever from Betty.

After a minute or two, he got up and turned around lazily and looked down insultingly at his

erstwhile partners in George G.'s doorstep. He made it plain as anything could be plain that he found their company profitless, saltless and unamusing.

He turned, in a walk that was practically a drawl of contempt, and went and stood in front of the four men who filled Mr. Sayles's doorway.

He closed one eye and looked down at them, in unveiled disapproval.

Finally, he voiced his studied judgment of them:

"Nu . . . Nu . . . Nun . . . *Not!* the price of a drink in the whole boilin' of you. Not if there was a row of you a mile long."

He turned and walked up the street, in the direction from which Betty had just come. It was plain to everybody that he was bored with the company. And that he was going somewhere to look for spirits.

He kept on up the street until he was near the Methodist church. Then, when he knew that a slight bend of the street had hidden him from the men whom he had left, he turned sharply and beat a rapid course across the open lots, past Satan's publishing house, and around into the street that ran north.

His maneuver had been executed without apparent haste, but with such neatness and celerity that he came up with Betty before she had gotten half way to George G.'s house.

Betty did not wait for him to talk.

"Jim," she said, "you owe George G. something for murdering him in his bed this morning."

Jim Smith saw the light in Betty's eyes, and he grinned hopefully. He was almost sure that he was going to be promised some excitement.

"I want you to take George G.'s car—you've had the key since this morning," said Betty rapidly, "and drive into the Constable's yard at just the stroke of midnight. You stop there in the yard, just for a second or so, and then drive out.

"Understand?" snapped Betty, for attention. "You don't know whether anybody gets into the car or not. If the worst comes to the worst, you can tell all the world that I told you to take the car and drive to Massena, Hogansburg, *Montreal.* That's all you know about it. That's all you care.

"Will you do this? Just as I say?"

Jim Smith took off his hat in admiration, and prepared to speak.

"Ssss . . . Sa . . . Sss . . . *Said* this morning I'd dance at your wedding. I'm ready to do better. If the preacher's missing I'll get you one, they're all my friends. If you want a best man, why, I'm the best man, for some things, you ever saw. And for a groom. Well, you know, you don't expect much from the groom. But I'd take his place and do the best I could."

Betty laughed happily. She knew that Jim

Smith was pleased with the business entrusted to him, and that he would be thorough, very thorough—and discreet. Or, if not discreet, he would, at least, be successful.

"I'm not going to give you any more instructions," she said. "You can use your own judgment. Only be on the minute promptly; and here's some money, just for necessary expenses. Take plenty of gasolene. I have to go in to see Mr. Allen."

Betty slipped a small wad of bills into his hand, and turned up the path that led in to Mr. Heman Allen's door.

Jim Smith, thus instructed and dismissed, walked on, as it was intended that he should, and slowly made his way up the road toward George G.'s house, to look the car over.

Mr. Heman Allen was what might be called the political leader of the town; if there had been any need of a leader in a community in which every sane person, except Satan and the Postmaster, voted the Republican ticket as a matter of conscience. Unlike most great political leaders of the day, Mr. Allen held public office himself. He did not feel above it. He was Pathmaster. He was Town Clerk. He was Tax Collector of the school district.

As Pathmaster, he supervised the building and repair of roads. As Town Clerk, he recorded deeds and mortgages, he kept the records of the

town, he granted hunting licenses and marriage licenses. As Tax Collector, he cheerfully allowed people to forget their taxes, and charged five per cent arrearage after a given date. Also, he sold fire insurance, lightning rods, life insurance, steel plows, school desks and picture frames.

In which of these varied capacities or activities Betty went to see Mr. Allen, can only be conjectured here.

At exactly one minute past twelve, Mr. Larue of the Sheriff's office heard the hum of an automobile under the window of the Constable's house, where he was spending the night. He did not connect the noise with the prisoner whom he had securely locked in the jail with his own hands. He at first thought that what he heard was an accentuation of the Constable's snoring, to the accompaniment of which he had fallen asleep an hour before.

When he recognized the unmistakable sputter of an automobile, he jumped out of bed, grabbed his gun from under his pillow, and ran to the open window.

"Hold up, or I shoot!" he yelled, waving his gun at the tail light of an automobile that was moving slowly out toward the street.

He shot. But the only answer was a roar from the open exhaust, as the car whipped out into the road and out of sight.

The Constable's wife screamed, and pushed Mr. Stevens out of bed.

Mr. Larue, who had been sleeping in his clothes, met Mr. Stevens at the head of the stairs.

"Nobody ever breaks my jail but Jim Smith," asserted the Constable, in defense of his jail.

"Who cares about you or your jail!" howled Mr. Larue. "My automobile's been stole. Git your pants on an' git me 'nuther one."

He scrambled down into the kitchen, circumnavigated that room twice, skinning his shins and knocking over furniture, until finally he found the back door and ran out into the yard.

As the Constable followed out into the yard, Mr. Larue shot again, what at, or why, we do not know.

Mrs. Stevens had thus been left alone in the house, and hearing the shot in the yard where her husband now was, she went into action.

She stuck her head out of the window and yelled to her crony and nearest neighbor:

"Murder an' thieves! Nellie Cramer, wake up! George G.'s broke out of the jail and stole the Sheriff's automobile! You lock your door tight! After this!"

So, from the shots and the women screaming in the clear night, the town was made aware that George G. was "at it again." And the town rose, as for a fire, to see the matter through.

"He's gone," said Mr. Stevens, standing in the open door of the black lock-up and fingering the door from which the staple and its padlock had been pulled free.

"Course he's gone, you Bull-head! But where's my automobile?"

"Right in there where you left it, an' I tell you nobody ever escaped from my jail before, I didn't think nobody could only Jim Smith."

"Say, who in ——'s running this thing? *Me* or Jim Smith? And who in —— *is* Jim Smith, anyway?"

"You never mind. You get your automobile, an' ketch my prisoner."

"You ain't got no prisoner," roared the Sheriff's deputy. "It's the Sheriff's prisoner."

"*He* ain't got none *neither,* less'n you yank your car out here, an' we ketch him," countered the Constable neatly.

This conversation was carried on in ear-splitting shouts, and Nellie Cramer had begun to scream her contribution; so that the village already jaded with three days of unheard-of sensation, awoke with a bad case of nerves. Shots, shouts and screams in the night brought everybody scurrying out into the warm darkness, but all, men, women and children, ready to do their duty, though badly frightened.

"He can't get far," shouted the Constable.

"He's too fat. An' he never was any hand to walk."

"Walk!" yelled Mr. Larue, banging open the door of the barn where his car stood. "Who said he was goin' to walk. I told you he went away in a car."

"No, you didn't, neither," bellowed the Constable, standing over Mr. Larue as he was cranking his car. "You said he stole your car, an' he didn't!"

"You Mullet Headed *Fish!*" said the Sheriff's deputy, straightening up and swinging the crank, "you git into that car, and *shut up!*"

The Constable scuttled into the car. Mr. Larue climbed in after, opened the throttle, and the car slid out into the yard. The two women were still screaming at each other from the windows.

Johile and another man ran into the yard. (Johile was never known to be worse than second in arriving at a fire at night, and this was practically as good as a fire.)

"Anybody killed?" yelled Johile.

Mr. Larue drove the automobile at the two men with what seemed a deliberate purpose to run over them. They dodged nimbly, and the Constable shouted:

"You get a car an' follow us. A prisoner has escaped!"

George G. was the first person who had been in the jail since the Fourth of July the year before, so it would seem that the Constable need not have been quite so reticent as to the identity of the prisoner. But that is not important.

The heavy ruts made by the car that had turned out into the road gave the direction for the pursuit. And in the path of their searchlight the track of the big car down the street was plain to the Constable and Mr. Larue.

"He didn't start for Oggensburg," said the Constable, with some pride in his prisoner. "He's too knowin' for that! If he turns at the butter factory, it means that he's headin' for Hogansburg an' the Canadian Line, where he can get across by land, without goin' near no ferry."

And so it seemed, for when they came to the butter factory, the tracks, instead of running straight up Hildreth's hill, turned and followed the river road toward Massena, and eventually, toward Hogansburg, Bombay, Montreal.

And then they could see the tail light of the car itself, flicking along among the trees on the long river bend below the village.

"Can you ketch 'em?" shouted the Constable, as they whirled around the corner. He was smelling blood. His professional instincts were roused as they had never been before.

"How d'ye know there's more'n one in that machine?" demanded the Deputy Sheriff in scorn.

"Well, how could George G. get out of jail an' go up to his own house an' get his car an' then come back an' let himself out of jail an' drive out of my yard, all by his own self? Why, he'd have to escape *twice* to do that!" reasoned the Constable triumphantly in loud shouts.

This made Mr. Larue mad. He was a deputy sheriff from the county seat. He did not want this country constable to teach him his own profession. It was impudence, and the Constable was a fresh hick. (You must remember that to a Canton man, a man from Yaleville is as much a "hick" as a man from Syracuse is to a New Yorker.)

"You know so much about it," Mr. Larue sneered. "Maybe you know *too* much about it. Maybe you pulled the staple off the lock-up your own self!"

"Ain't nobody every busted my jail," asseverated the Constable unperturbed, "only Jim Smith."

"Say!" bellowed the Deputy Sheriff in a rage. "If you mention 'Jim Smith' again, I'll guzzle you! Who in Tunket *is* Jim Smith, anyway?"

"He's down ahead there, drivin' that there car," returned the Constable deftly, "you'll make his acquaintance, if your car's good enough."

This ended conversation. The Constable was so pleased with his brilliant retort that he didn't want to speak again. He just wanted to remem-

ber it word for word, so that he could tell it to the folks just as he had said it to the Deputy Sheriff. Mr. Larue was so mad that he could not say anything. Short of pitching the Constable out and killing him right there, nothing could have been of any use.

The car shot down the curving river road, panting like a hound. Larue did not know the road as, presumably, the driver of the other car knew it. But he was in a red rage and he could see the light of his quarry before him. There were soft ruts in the road, and mean little gullies, where the rain of the previous night had run down from the hillsides and cut deep through the dirt surface. Larue thought nothing of these things. If he reasoned at all, he reasoned that another car had gone this way at just this pace, and that it was his business to go a little faster than that other car had gone. The Constable held his hat with one hand, and with the other he clutched the side of the car, holding on for dear life. He was fully occupied.

For half a mile below the village the river eddied, and swirled and spread itself in fan cascades over the flat rock ledges of its primeval bed. Then it rippled down gently, over and around the smooth round gravel stones, the great cobbles that it had dug out of the earth in the course of the ages by sticking its elbow into the hillside at the bend. Thus it had made for itself a wide, sweep-

ing turn, where it lost the momentum of the rapids above and eased itself down amongst little islands of its own making, until it slipped almost imperceptibly into a deep still pond that stretched away four miles through the bosom of the rolling hills.

The road did not follow the river level. Where the river dropped a full sixty feet in the mile-long bend below the village, the road held its own level and ran along the face of the hillside. On the left, neat farms, crowned by low white houses, their meadows now cut and trimmed clean, came sloping easily down to the road. On the right, the hill fell away sharply, a long swift slide to the river's edge. And the water was deep along this edge. You could tell that, even in the dark, by the way the hill dropped sheer into the river.

"He's stopped!" yelled the Constable.

The Deputy Sheriff pretended not to hear, but he looked across the river's curve and saw that the light of the other car appeared to be stationary, or he thought so. He was not sure, and he certainly was not going to give the Constable any credit for the discovery. He jammed his foot down on the throttle pedal and drove his car ahead at the very limit of its speed.

From the intermittent glimpses that they got of the light it became plain that the other car was now stopped, or moving very slowly as though crippled.

"We'll get you yet!" shouted the irrepressible Constable. "You can't bust *my* jail an' get away with it!"

He pulled off his straw hat, threw it down into the bottom of the car and put his foot on it. Being thus cleared for action, he pulled his handcuffs from his pocket, and shook them menacingly at the Racquette River.

"When I go after a prisoner, I *go after* him. An' he don't escape, neither!" He did not say that the Deputy Sheriff was to blame for the escape of George G. But the implication was plain enough.

Mr. Larue said nothing. He merely crouched down farther under the steering wheel and grunted. What he meant was that he hoped there would be at least an exchange of a few shots between himself and the other car, in the course of which he hoped that he would get a chance to kill the Constable, accidentally.

They were fairly tearing along the gravel road, and when they came to a long straight stretch of nearly half a mile they could see the other car away ahead of them, and moving.

At least it was not standing still. The light was waving crazily from side to side of the road.

"He's crazy! Or he's drunk! Or his crank's broke!" the Constable howled.

They were charging down upon the light at a

good forty miles an hour, and in less than another minute they would be up with their game.

"By Gosh!" the Constable broke out again, "if he don't look out, he'll run down Ice Lane!"

The Ice Lane that he spoke of was an open track that led off very slightly from the road. It ran so nearly parallel to the road that it could easily be, and often was, mistaken for the road itself. Then it took gently over the shoulder of the hill, and ran diagonally down across a sharply sloping meadow, straight down into the river.

The butter factory people, and other people who had horses and ice houses, used the lane in winter time to haul up the ice which they cut from the broad, clear pond of the river here. In summer, during dry spells, the farmers used the lane to draw up water from the river. This they did by putting barrels on a stone boat, which is a conveyance made of two wide planks turned up slightly at the forward end, and making a team of horses drag the barrels of water home by main strength. So, Ice Lane had been worn deep and hard and smooth by the stone boats, until it was as straightaway and swift as a steel chute. You could push a wagon ever so slightly over the brow of the hill and let it go, and in half a minute it would go *plunk!* into twenty feet of water. Why, the boys once loaded Jont Al-

len's mule on his platform wagon, and— But that is neither here nor there.

"He ain't got no headlight!" the Constable discovered. "That's what's the matter with him!"

It was plain that the car, wobbling ahead of them did not have any strong light in front. There was no flare at all upon the road or on the trees ahead of it, but even this did not account for the car's conduct. Either its steering gear must be hopelessly useless or the driver must be crazy. Or, if you had imagination, you could suppose that there were two men in the front seat of that car, and that they were fighting for control of it.

Mr. Larue, being a man who used imagination in his profession, jumped to the last hypothesis. He believed that there were two men, and that one of them had lost nerve for this desperate enterprise and was trying to make the other turn back.

He blew a terrific blast from his horn—for what purpose we do not know. Then brought his own speed down to a measure of safety, and prepared to run past the other car, if only it would stay long enough on one side or the other of the road.

"There he goes, by Gunfire!" yelled the Constable, rattling his puissant handcuffs in the air.

The light ahead of them swung over to the right side of the road. It held there a moment,

while the Deputy Sheriff, thinking that his chance had come, pushed in his speed again and started to shoot by.

Then, just while he blinked one eye, the light bobbed a little farther to the side—and disappeared, absolutely, as if it had been shot out!

Larue drove his car as nearly as he could judge straight at the break in the fringe of raspberry bushes where the light had disappeared.

"Haw off! Haw off!" The Constable seemed to think that it was a pair of oxen they were driving. "D'ye want to run *us* into the river, too!" And he made a grab at the steering wheel.

Larue shook off the Constable's hand, but he did pull over a little to the left. And then he saw, to his great surprise, that he had not been on the road at all, but on some kind of a hard, smooth track. He stopped the car with a grinding slue that wrenched the frame to the last bolt; and they saw right beside them the gap in the bushes where the other car had gone through.

They jumped out and ran to the gap.

"I toldja!" howled the Constable, as though he held Mr. Larue responsible. "There they go, right plumb-ding into deep water! An' they'll never come out, 'cept with a draggin' hook!"

The Deputy Sheriff saw for himself.

A thousand feet away, and a hundred feet lower than where they stood, there went the car which they had been pursuing. Its headlights were

now on, throwing a gleaming bar of light straight down the white ribbon of Ice Lane, and out over the still, black water.

The rear light of the car flashed like an incandescent bullet, for the car had gained terrific speed in the long straight drop of the lane.

It was but the winking of an eye, a single photographic impression on the retina, and then the car shot free of the bank, rose in a flashing arch, and took a clear flying leap out over the water. Then, still arching, it dropped its nose down, struck the water, clean! Without a splash! And sank, swift as a dagger, right out of sight!

The total darkness came back on the two men with a thud.

"Grea—!" the Deputy Sheriff began. But he left his remark unfinished in the air.

The Constable was for once speechless.

"You said there was two?" Mr. Larue asked.

"George G. an' Jim Smith, must be," said the Constable, as if in a trance. Then he roused himself. "Godfrey! Maybe they ain't drownded! Maybe they're strugglin' in the water! Blow your horn like Sam Hill, an' bring help!"

He started running down Ice Lane.

Mr. Larue blew his horn mightily.

As if in answer, another automobile came tearing around the long bend from the village. Lon Whitcomb's dog began to bark ferociously.

Roosters called from farm to farm. The countryside was waking.

Billy King, Johile and Claver, the bank investigator (the last named had jumped from his bed in the American House where he and Mr. Trait were sleeping, and had come along half dressed), arrived as the Deputy Sheriff was turning his car to show the headlight toward the village.

"They went right down like a stone!" he told them. "Riceweather, and this here, now, Jim Smith. There ain't no chance that they got clear of the car. It went right down head first on top of 'em!"

This was more, a great deal more, than Mr. Larue could actually have seen with his eyes. But his imagination had seen the completing details.

"I want one of you to stay here with my car. And I want one of you to turn around and go back and get more men, and teams, and hooks. We got to haul out the car, and may be drag the river."

Part of this he got a chance to say to the two men and the boy. But the most of it he had to shout uselessly after their backs as they ran tumbling down Ice Lane in the dark.

He did not wait for others to come. He knew that the forces already here were not enough

to move the car from the bodies of the two men, or to drag the river. He must rouse the village. He started back up the road that he had come, blowing his horn furiously.

Back in the village, he banged Mr. Joseph Bartlett and his whole hotel into activity. By telephone he called the Coroner of the County. Then he reported, somewhat crest-fallen, but stubbornly insisting that he was in no way to blame, to his chief in the Sheriff's office in Canton. His prisoner had escaped, he admitted. But the prisoner and the man who had helped him to escape were both now dead. He knew that he would probably lose his place as a deputy. He knew that he would be made the scapegoat for the whole unfortunate affair. But he argued back sullenly over the wire. The prisoner had not escaped from him. He had killed himself in attempting to escape. And that was all that the law could do about it.

Meantime, the Methodist church bell was ringing. People were running toward the jail from all sides of the village. And the Constable's wife, being alone and complete in authority, was holding forth vigorously before the violated jail.

The Deputy Sheriff hurried over from the hotel into the Constable's yard, and put himself at the head of things.

"And here is the very *weepon* that they used to break into the jail!" In the light from over

the jail door, the Constable's wife held up a small crowbar, for the inspection of the Deputy Sheriff, and the edification of the people.

The staple from the jail door was still jammed tight upon the crowbar, with the lock dangling from it. The jail-breaker, whoever it was, had taken no pains to conceal the incriminating instrument of the deed. He had just jammed the crowbar into the staple, and pried staple and lock off together, and then he had just dropped the whole clutter down beside the jail door, and let it lie there.

"This," said the Deputy Sheriff, taking the bar and staple and lock and holding them up to view, "would be valuable evidence, if we needed evidence. But we don't. There's evidence enough to put *anybody* in jail. But the one that used this bar ain't ever goin' to jail. He's at the bottom of the river, with Riceweather's big automobile on top of him!"

"Oh! My Lamb! My poor little, motherless little Lamb! Oh, why didn't I watch her! Why didn't I—why didn't I——!"

A maidenly little woman, her white hair streaking haggardly down over her shoulders, her pale kindly little features distorted fearfully with fright and horror, came up in front of the Deputy Sheriff, crying, and holding up her hands for the crowbar. It was Miss Susan Wilbur, Betty's cousin.

"It's mine!" she moaned. "Mine! Betty took it from the woodshed. Nobody else could have got it. She took it and pried the jail door open herself—she never was afraid of anything! Oh, dear, oh, oh, oooooh——!"

"Where *is* Betty?" asked some one, speaking up in pity; for Miss Susan's grief was heart-rending.

"Oh! Can't you understand! She's gone! Gone with George G.! Gone to her death! Down! Down under the cold, cold water!

"Oh, why, why didn't I watch her better! Why didn't I—" And the poor little soul just stood and screamed her heart out. And screamed and cried until she staggered and fell, senseless, right down in the crowd.

Now, *here* was tragedy.

George G.'s doings during the week had been more or less unreal. *He* might have ridden into the river and drowned himself. And people would have been sorry, of course. But it would have been some time before everybody believed it, entirely.

George G. and Jim Smith might have gotten into the river and both been drowned, as the Deputy Sheriff had reported. It would have been an awful thing. Though some might have said that it was just the end to be expected for these two—after all that had happened earlier in the week. But, even then, until every one had seen

their bodies actually buried, there would have been a certain skepticism lurking around.

But there was no doubting *this!*

George G. and Betty! The great man of the town! And the brightest, prettiest, best loved girl that anybody knew!

It was love and tragedy, just like out of a book!

It was sin (it must be some kind of a sin to break open the jail) and love and death—dropping like the lightning ball of Judgment!

And, to think that it had fallen most upon poor little Miss Susan, who had never had love or lover in her life!

The Constable's wife got Miss Susan lifted and carried into the house. It was hoped that more details might be had when she should come to.

But the stampede had already started. The Deputy Sheriff did not need to call for volunteers. Every man and boy who could get any kind of a foothold on his automobile was already aboard, among them the other bank investigator. And before the car had started down the river road, there was already a line of men and boys, and some women, running hot foot and excited down along the long bend of the river.

Women, mothers, ran home, straight home, and locked up their girl children in the house.

The long, deep-lying pond of the river was soon lighted in a lurid and eerie fashion.

They, Johile and Billy King principally, had broken into a nearby boathouse and found some fishing jacks. These are baskets made of iron hoops, set on top of iron handles, to be set upright in the bow of a boat and used while spearing fish at night. They had filled them with pine knots and resinous faggots that they had found dry stored in the boathouse ready for some illegal spearing foray, on a night when the game warden was known to be out of reach.

Before the Deputy Sheriff and his car full of men were halfway back to the head of Ice Lane, the fishing jacks were lighted, and the heavy, blood-colored flames from the fat wood were flaring red over the black water.

Under this weird lighting, two boats were launched out over the spot where the automobile had gone down, and men lying over the prows of the boats with the red lights blazing directly over their heads could see deep down into the water where the car lay, nose down and tilted on its side.

Then, with hoarse shouting that was meant to be subdued and respectful, two teams of horses were brought down Ice Lane, and logging chains were gotten from the nearest farm barns.

No one who was in that rapidly growing, creepy, awe-stricken crowd of people who stood at the foot of Ice Lane will ever forget the clanking

and the rattle of those chains as the men took them on the boats and with the grappling log-hooks on the ends of them began paying the chains down into the water, to grasp whatever the hooks could lay hold on.

When two of the chains were felt to be securely snagged to some substantial part of the car, the chains were brought ashore and the horses were hitched to them.

In a breathless, fearsome hush they started to drive the horses up the bank with the chains swishing and rattling gruesomely through the water. It was a nerve-wracking moment or two, until a great black body came surging up out of the water and flounderingly resolved itself into the cover of George G.'s automobile. Then the car itself, with more shouting now, came swashing and swaying up out of the water. And with a final furious drive of the horses it was pulled clear, and upright, up over the edge of the bank.

Courageous men blocked the front wheels of the car with stones, while the people crowded, or rather pushed each other, forward for the first look into the interior.

The car was empty!

I do not say that the people were angry. In fact, there is no doubt that the first ones who peered fearsomely into the weirdly lighted car

were somewhat relieved that they did not see there, clasped in each other's arms, the bodies of the two who had taken the mad way to death. But it was—disappointing, a little.

The Constable, who was in a position of authority by reason of his priority on the scene, gave the explanation.

"There's just enough current here," he said, "to wash them down and carry them along the bottom, slow. We'll have to drag the pond." He was a little shaken in his confidence in himself since he had been told that it was not Jim Smith, but a girl who had broken his jail. But he was still in command of the situation, and determined to retain his leadership.

"Git more boats, Johile; an' more lights. We might have to drag all the way to Ramonsville."

Then, slowly, with more shouting, and the venturesome launching of unused and leaky boats, and more dark red lights scattering over the bosom of the water, the scene broadened and lengthened out, until the bed of the river was being prodded and dragged with long pikepoles and hooks for half a mile down its length and for perhaps a quarter of its breadth.

The dragging of a river, by amateurs, and to the amateurs, is, at any time, the most enthralling and exciting business in the world. At night, and under these uncertain reddish lights, it made the blood shiver. Any soft thing that you pulled

up out of the bottom of the river might be, might be—almost anything at all!

And when you remembered that it might be *George G.* who had your money in his bank!

Or that it might be, even, Ugh!—and you remembered Betty's curly brown hair! And her eyes, that used to make your ears feel warm when she looked at you!

Yes. It was the most fearsome business that any of these amateurs had ever engaged in.

And even to the women and the boys, following and straggling along the bank, it was the most enthralling night that they ever saw. Every minute some man in a boat, sometimes two or three men at the same time, in different boats, could be seen struggling to pull something up out of the water. And every time it seemed almost certain that it was a body. And somebody shouted that it *was*. And it must be *something*, and it *might* be!

Jim Smith lay on the top of the hill, under the fringe of the raspberry bushes, and surveyed the scene on the river with a gentle, drowsy eye.

Several times, under the urge of a pint of Canadian *high wines* which he had been taking quietly but consistently, he had been tempted to go down and assist with advice in the matter of dragging the river.

But he had remained hidden where he was, from a feeling of proper delicacy. Since they were

dragging the river for his body, he reasoned, it would look more or less thankless on his part if he should break in on the business.

If they should take him for a ghost, which they might do if he appeared suddenly among them, it would certainly frighten the women. And if they did not take him for a ghost, well, it would certainly break up the party. And he didn't want to do that.

Besides, he was very comfortable where he was. He had finished the pint of *high wines*. But he could feel the comforting assurance that there was another pint bottle, full, in his other hip pocket.

He opened the second bottle and took a small drink, just to be amply sure that it was what it purported to be. Then he lay back again, comfortably watching the moving lights upon the river and listening to the softened voices of the people as they came floating up to him.

Then he went to sleep.

XII

"WONDER where Jim Smith got to with my car," speculated George G. He was sitting on a stump, munching a roast beef sandwich with much relish. His car had cost him thirty-seven hundred dollars, and it had been the pride of his life. Yet he seemed only mildly interested as to where Jim Smith had gone with it.

"I'll bet he's in Canada by this time," said Betty. "They never could catch up to him in that car. And the farther he goes, the farther they'll follow him!" She meant, of course, that the farther Jim Smith's probable pursuers followed him toward Canada and the north, the farther they would be led away from the track of George G., who was traveling south.

Betty did not know that Jim Smith had so improved upon her plan that now there never would be any pursuit of George G., or of anybody else.

Jim Smith had led the trail into the river, and had sunk it there.

"We should have taken the car and gone that way ourselves," said George G., ungratefully. He knew very well that if Betty had not virtually hauled him out of the jail he would have been

there yet, with no chance to go anywhere, by foot or by car.

"Why! What's the matter with this?" bridled Betty. "Aren't you having a good time?"

"Best in my life!" said George G. warmly. "But, what about you? I feel like a brute. You're all tired and worn out! We've walked all night long. You're ready to drop! We should have taken the car and beat it."

"Never!" Betty stamped her foot. "Never! I wouldn't *have* you running away to Canada! Like a—like a thief!"

George G. winced. But then he grinned. "And just what," he inquired, "am I supposed to be doing now? If I'm not running away."

"You're *not* running away!" Betty stamped her foot again. "You're doing nothing of the kind! You're just *staying out* of jail, until they've found that they haven't got anything against you. Then, you'll walk back, and laugh at them!"

"Walk?" said George G. doubtfully. At that moment he was hoping that he would never have to walk again in his life.

"Oh, no. Of course, you don't have to *walk* back! You can go back around by train. Your poor little feet might be tired!" jibed Betty. "Anyway," she planned out loud, "I think I'll put you on the train at Tupper Lake, and you can go to New York, or wherever you like."

"Yes?" said George G., his voice rising

belligerently as his body rose from the stump. "And what about you?"

"Oh, I'll just walk back the way I came, picking berries along the road. Nobody will have missed me. Susan thinks I went out visiting in the country last night." (Betty must have forgotten where she left Susan's crowbar last night.) "And I can send you word of how it comes out."

"You'll do no such—!" began George G., angrily.

"I'll do what I think best," said Betty, easily. "And so will you."

George G., whom we have never called brilliant, anyhow, did not get the entire force of Betty's last sentence.

On the face of it, Betty seemed to have said that she would do as she wished, and that he would do as *he* wished— And this certainly, George G. said to himself, was "fifty-fifty and fair enough." So he let it stand.

They were eating breakfast—though it might just as well have been called supper, for they had walked all through the night—in a sunny little clearing in the woods, off the road, by Ratnie brook in the Town of Colton.

George G. was dressed in overalls, and a big loose jacket over his everyday clothes, with an old straw hat on him. Betty had hoped that he would look just like an ordinary berry picker along the road. He did not look like anything

of the kind. But they had not met any one during the night, and the few sleepy-eyed people who had seen them on the road since dawn probably did think that they were just early berry pickers, for it was the season of the raspberries and the early blackberries.

Betty had arrived at the jail just one hour before Jim Smith. It had taken her five minutes with the crowbar to get the door open. Then it had taken her ten minutes, with cajolery, persuasion, and finally some main strength, to get George G. out of the jail. But once she had led him across the bridge and out on the open road to the south, he had come along as willingly as any led horse. He did not approve. He was sure that Betty and he were both crazy. He feared that Jim Smith would raise a rumpus that would set the whole town after them in no time. But he had worried and battled so long alone with his own troubles that he did not now care. He was only too glad to let Betty lead.

The fact is that he was so sleepy—he had not closed his eyes since the night before last when he had found himself crawling on the floor in the midst of the storm with his head cracked —that he did not want to decide anything for anybody. He just wanted to watch the morning sun sparkling on Betty's hair, until he could no longer hold his eyes open. Then he would slide

down from his stump to the grass, and curl up and go to sleep. And this he promptly did.

"How like a man!" said Betty, speaking as though from years of experience. But she took the blanket which she had carried all night in a roll across her shoulder, and slipped some of it under his head and some of it between his body and the dew which had not yet dried from the grass.

George G. slept like a log until noon.

Betty packed away the remainder of the breakfast in a big basket that George G. had carried all night, and from the same basket she brought out a small pail and started picking berries, around the circle of the little clearing which they had picked out after dawn as a safe place in which to spend the day.

They felt sure that they had left no particular trace along the road. And even if they should be followed at once—which was not likely, because Betty was sure that Jim Smith would lead somebody a good long chase somewhere—but even if they were followed at once, the pursuit would be pretty sure to pass by here and go on a long way beyond, before it would turn to hunt the woodside for them.

Betty was not worrying about pursuit, though she stepped carefully and avoided thrashing about in the bushes, for she knew how such noises may sometimes travel in the woods.

She was so happy that no shadow, no worry could come between her and the warm sweetness of the dancing sun. She walked in happiness and breathed delight. She had had her will!

No one now could say that she had connived to marry George G.'s money. He didn't *have* any money! When they ran away from the jail, she had more money than he did, a good deal more.

George G. was no longer her employer. He was no longer the great man, whom few girls would dare refuse. He was just a man, a little older, but not a bit wiser, than herself. And he was in trouble. And she was watching over him and guarding him from his enemies while he slept.

It was all that Betty could ask for: better than she could ever have dreamed!

So, naturally, having her heart content with just what she wanted, Betty, being a woman, wanted something else right away.

She had hated George G.'s money. And it had made her very happy to realize that George G. was now no richer than she was. But, having had that come true, she immediately wanted something else.

She wanted George G. to get his money back.

She didn't want his money. So far as she was personally concerned, she preferred George G. without money. But she knew that George G., to

reëstablish himself, to defeat his enemies triumphantly, and especially old Sessions, to be able to look the world down; George G. must have his money.

And she began to wish it back.

The robbers must have gone somewhere with the money. It must be *somewhere* this moment. The men couldn't just keep it in a bag forever! They had to go somewhere to spend some of it. Well, wouldn't somebody see about it, or hear about it!

Why! They might even have come this way! They didn't go by Ogdensburg, for George G. had driven all the way there. Of course! They might have come this way!

So Betty began to look out for the robbers, and for George G.'s money. And she was even happier than she had been when she was entirely content.

She thought she ought to wake George G. up and tell him about it. But she had a doleful foresight that George G. would probably go back to sleep again while being told.

So she picked berries, and hunted the robbers gingerly around through the woods.

George G. awoke at noon. He was hungry, but also he was thoughtful. And his first care was that Betty should eat, and then that she should sleep. She said that she had eaten berries all morning, and that she was not sleepy.

"Berries!" snorted George G. "The birds eat berries all day for pastime, but when they want something to *eat* they go looking for red meat. Eat a sandwich."

He took charge of the commissary as heartily as if he himself had supplied it, and forced Betty to eat.

He took her tin cup and crossed Ratnie brook up into the deep woods, looking for a spring. He came back with a cool drink for Betty. Then he wrapped her up in the blanket, filled his coat with grass for a pillow for her and set up his big straw hat on a stick to shade her face.

"I've been looking for your burglars all morning," said Betty, curling up contentedly under the hat. "What if they came this way, and were hiding right up here in some of these woods!"

"What makes you say that?" said George G., jumping up and walking around the stump. "What do you think? Have you any notion ——?"

"No," said Betty quickly. "No, I hadn't the least reason to think of them here. I guess it was just because I was wishing so hard for you to get your money back."

"Is that so!" said George G. "And just night before last you thought money was the lowest thing on earth!"

"Oh yes," said Betty, "but you hadn't *lost* it then."

"Um—mm!" said George G. "I wish I knew where it is anyway."

"Did you find any of their tracks at all?" Betty inquired; though she felt sure that she would be asleep before she could hear the answer.

"Not a track!" said George G., walking around the stump again. "The thunderstorm came on while I was lying knocked out from the crack on the head. It rained pitchforks! So there wasn't a footprint or a wheel track left. But I sure thought I was right behind them on the way to Ogdensburg. Why, Betty, I would have bet my soul on that hunch! I was sure I had them. But I was fooled. And then, when I got back, there was that ding-dang mob running all over everything. Then the run was on the bank.

"But no, Betty, I don't think they came this way. You see, I know those men. I know their type," explained George G. didactically. "They're woodsmen, or they used to be. But they never *lived* in the woods. They'd follow a logging boss through the woods all winter. But, left to themselves, they wouldn't spend a night in the woods, not if they could help it. They always had a cookey and a stable boss to look after them. They wouldn't know what to do by themselves. They'd get lost. And they'd starve.

"No, they went straight down the river and crossed into Canada that way. Or, they went to Malone. That's a place that they'd be sure to

know—and by this time they're on their way up into the big Canadian woods. You see, Betty, it isn't like an ordinary robbery. They haven't got any bulky things to carry, or to dispose of. You can put all that money right in their pockets. Why, you could put it all in a——!"

He looked down at Betty, and stopped short. Betty was sleeping soundly.

George G. resumed his walk around the stump. But he walked differently now. He paced around the stump and around Betty with a careful tread, lest he should wake her (she was so tired that he might have shouted his lungs out at her without disturbing her), but yet his walk was heavy with his responsibility. He was on guard for Betty.

For an hour and a half he trod a path around Betty and the stump.

Sometimes he walked fast, tramping swiftly and roughly, and it was plain that he was thinking of his robbers, and following them in his mind. Sometimes he walked slowly and doubtingly, with a sturdy, stubborn setting down of his feet, so that you could have understood that he was facing his troubles through, and determined to fight the matter out right here if it took him all the rest of his life.

But he was at all times alertly on guard. He glowered ferociously at every twig that cracked and at every noisy bird that whirred through the woods.

He frowned at every cloud that crossed the sun. When a rumble of thunder rolled up the Racquette valley, a mile or two away, he stopped to face it. And he outfaced it—or so it seemed. For the thunder went on up the valley, leaving Betty unmolested.

It was the threat of rain that unnerved him. He looked down at the little bundle of Betty curled up under the hat. Then he looked at the drifting rain mist in the hollow of the river's course, not half a mile away from where they were; and George G. could feel the chill of it on the air. If it should come this way he did not know what he would do. He wanted to pick Betty up and run with her to the nearest house.

What *would* he do, if it should rain and storm and turn mean and cold, as it often did even in summer in the hills? He would have to take Betty to some shelter. There he would almost surely be recognized and arrested. And Betty would be arrested, too! She had broken the jail door! It has to be said for George G. that he had not thought of *that* before.

He turned furiously angry at himself, and swore, and blamed himself bitterly for a fool. He should have made Betty go home the minute he got out of the jail, even if he had to carry her with his hand over her mouth!

"I'm a confounded fool and a ninny!" said George G. "If I wasn't, I'd never have let her

come out with me." (The truth was the other way. George G. came with Betty.)

"She'll get a wetting and catch her death of cold! And then I'll have to take her somewhere, whether she wants to or not, and we'll both be arrested. *And we're not even married!* We've got to get married first thing! Right away!" (Now getting married would not save Betty from the imminent wetting. Nor would it save her from being arrested.)

"I'll wake her up right now and tell her about it!"

He looked at the distant rain glimmering in the sunlight. Then he looked at Betty sleeping happily under the hat.

"I hate to wake her up," he temporized. "I'll give her two minutes." He took out his watch.

At the end of the two minutes he looked at the valley again. The slight wind was holding steady, straight south, up the hollow of the river. The rain cloud was passing by them, thinning and brightening in the pursuing sunshine that was chasing it up the valley.

"It won't rain *here,* now," prophesied George G. "I'll let her sleep as long as the heat lasts."

George G. was glad of the respite, for he knew that Betty needed the sleep. But he was not to be turned from his determination, that they must be married the moment Betty awoke. He must get ready right away.

He pulled off his jacket, slipped out of the overalls, and stepped forth—a man about to be married.

He seemed to feel that there was something missing. He was sure that there was something wrong, something vitally necessary that he had forgotten, and his ears began to get hot immediately. He could feel the morbid wedding crowd gaping at him already! *Was* there anything wrong with him?

He began to feel around stealthily for essential buttons, and to see if his necktie had gotten out of his collar. It wasn't *that*. He was all safe and correct. But *still* there was something wrong. And he could not think what it was.

We know, of course, what the trouble was. He wanted his high hat. In his mental pictures of himself getting married he had never appeared without his high hat. It was so naturally a part of himself in the picture that he thought, of course, he had it on now. But he had not. And *that* was what was the matter with him!

He went down to Ratnie brook, washed his hands and face and slicked down his hair with his hands. He felt better. He came back and sat down on the stump, to wait for Betty to wake up and get married. Betty slept, without a move, until it was almost sundown. George G. only waked her when he felt the evening chill coming up from the river.

"We have no time to lose," he explained. "Of course, you must eat something; but we'll get going just as fast as we can."

"Good Gracious!" said Betty. "Where's your jacket? And your overalls?"

"We're going to get married."

"What for?" inquired Betty. "We'd better keep the overalls on, and get a good long ways away from here before we think of that!"

"We've *got* to get married. We can't go around this way."

"But, we *are* going around this way," objected Betty.

"We can't go on. Suppose it had rained!"

"We'd have gotten wet."

"You would," said George G., "and then I should have had to pick you up and carry you to some house. And what could I say? Good Lord, what *could* I say? I couldn't say, 'This is my wife,' I couldn't say, 'This is—' Jumping Judas! What *could* I say?"

"Couldn't you say, 'This is something wet that I found out in the rain.' You could carry me on the end of a stick."

I think Betty awoke in a little temper, to begin with, and probably slightly feverish from sleeping in the sun. George G. should have been warned by the edge in her voice. But George G.'s head, as we have long suspected, was not subtle. It

was a good solid head. But—well, we will leave it at that. It was solid.

So, he only stared at Betty in reply. And then he went back to his contention.

"We've got to get married, I tell you. It's no way for people of our position to be travelling."

"It was good enough to start out with," Betty hit back meanly.

But George G. had no ear for innuendoes. He was honestly thinking of Betty and of the danger to her health, and of the shame and humiliation that might come to her. But to Betty it appeared that he was thinking only of himself, and that he thought of her good name as a thing which he soon would own, and which must be guarded for that reason.

Betty stopped in the act of choking down her own dry food, which she had now begun to hate. I think, above all things, she wanted to smash George G. in the eye with a sandwich. But she ground her teeth desperately into the heel of the sandwich, and said nothing for the moment.

They took the road again as soon as it was dusk.

They were not inclined to quarrel, but there was something threatening in the air that should have warned them. George G. was stubbornly set on one idea. Betty was suspicious, and determined to balk him.

What happened may have been inevitable. Or it may have been pure contrariness on both sides. They have all their lives to settle that question for themselves.

They were on the road to Piercefield, with the climbing hills piling up all about them. In their one night's journey they had left the sand roads and the level country behind, and they were now boring straight in among the northern outposts of the Adirondacks.

In a general way Betty knew the country, though she had never been over the entire route that they were taking. After getting out of the hammock last night, her plan had come to her, complete and simple.

George G. must not try to leave town by any of the usual ways. He must leave absolutely no trace of himself beyond the jail door. Everybody must be forced to believe that he had gone away in the car which Jim Smith would drive out of the Constable's yard.

So, George G. could not take a train anywhere within miles of Yaleville. And if she tried to get another automobile for him, it would be known somehow, and the car could be traced.

George G. must walk. And to make sure that he did walk, and to furnish an explanation for his being on the road, Betty decided that she must go with him, pretending to pick berries. Then, if

they were noticed at all, they might very easily be passed as a pair of casual berry pickers.

They could walk straight south, following the Racquette valley, three nights, fifty miles, to somewhere near Tupper Lake. There they would strike the Mohawk & Malone railroad. This was a road that did not pass anywhere near Yaleville. And so it would not be watched. No one would think it likely, or even possible, for George G. to reach that road undetected. Therefore, that was the way he must go: the way that seemed impossible.

Betty's daring imagination made the plan. And she trusted to her ready tongue to talk George G. into it, and to her will power to make him go through it with her.

Now George G. threatened to spoil the whole arrangement with his ill-timed talk about getting married.

"The first house we come to," said George G., "we'll stop and ask where there's a preacher. There's always one somewhere."

"We'll do nothing of the kind. We'll keep right on walking, to-night and to-morrow night, till we get near the "M. & M." Then you can get on a train and go where you like."

"Why!" said George G., like a fool, "I can do that alone. What's the use of dragging you all that——!"

"Who's dragging me! I'm not a drag on anybody! I wouldn't 've come at all if I thought you didn't want me."

"Of course, I wanted you, Betty! And I'd never have had the sense to come by myself, and we both know it. But, we've got to get married. Right away!"

"Oh! Why can't you think of something cheerful! You come in with that like a final *Amen,* after the end of everything!"

"I don't care whether it's cheerful or not," said George G. "I've got to live all my life among folks that know me, and that know my wife. Twenty years from now when my children are growing up, I'm not going to have folks telling how my wife ran away with me, and how we wandered around whole days and nights in the woods, before we were married at all!"

"You needn't," snapped Betty. "You can go right back and marry the one you proposed to first."

"Darned lie!" bawled George G. "I never proposed——"

"You did!"

"I didn't!"

"You did, too!"

"I did not!"

"You made a laughing stock of me! And you made a fool of yourself! Who'll tell *that* to your children?"

"What's that got to do with the matter?" said George G. brazenly. "We're here. We're facing facts. You are going to be my wife. And the thing for us to do is to find a preacher and get married. Right away!"

"Oh! *Stop* it!" said Betty. "You repeat like a parrot! Why don't you make a song out of it and sing it?"

"Yes, and I'm going to keep right on repeating it until we're married."

"Who *said* we were going to be married? *I* never said it."

Right here, from somewhere among the lumber of his muddled head, George G. pulled out that old fallacy that has gotten men into more trouble than a concert of nations could get them out of. Somebody, some time, had told him that, no matter how much they kicked, women and horses really love to be mastered. So now George G. decided that it was time for him to be master.

"*I* said it." George G. stamped one foot after the other. "It's time that this nonsense was stopped. And I'm going to stop it. We stop at that next house"—there was a lighted window ahead of them, perhaps a quarter of a mile up the road—"and find out where the minister lives. And we'll hunt him right up and get married. Right away!"

"Oh, stop your nonsense! I'm *not* going to be

married on the jump," said Betty, "like a gypsy over a stick!"

"What! Well, I tell you right now, we'll be married, as circumstances," said George G. mightily, "and *I* dictate."

"*Bah!* I wouldn't marry you for *five million dollars!* You're a—you're a big bully!"

George G. grabbed her arm. The idea of mastery had gone to his head.

"You're a little vixen, and a firebrand! I'm going to be the head of my own house. We're going to be married right——"

Betty yanked her arm away, and whirled on him. She tore the blanket roll from her shoulders, swung it, and brought it down like a flail on George G.'s head.

And then she was gone: a slim streak of fire and fury shooting up the road into the enveloping darkness.

Betty had no thought of where she was going. She thought of nothing, wanted nothing, but to get away from George G. She hated him. He wanted to crush her, and break her down to his brute will!

She would run, and run! There was a light up the road ahead of her. She must not run near that light, for she knew from experience that George G. could catch her in straight running.

At the first break in the underbrush she darted

off the road and sped in among the bushes, striking right away from the road. She thought George G. could not see her leave the road, and that she made no noise running through the bushes. But when she stopped an instant, to breathe and listen, she heard George G. thrashing through the bushes like a mad bull behind her.

Then Betty turned frantic. She knew that she loved George G. She knew that George G. would rather die than hurt her. But the floundering, raging threat of his big body plunging through the bushes, pursuing her, drove her mad.

She dashed blindly on through bushes and between trees, stumbling, running, tripping, turning this way and that, thinking only to get where she would no longer hear that noise of his heavy feet pounding after her.

For an hour she beat her way like a bird in a storm, running first to right and then to left, a zigzag course, to get away from the sound of him behind her. Then, finally, she could no longer hear him. But still she knew that he was behind her—she knew that dogged, unwinking persistence of his way—and if she faltered he would be stalking upon her.

But when she at last felt that he was no longer following her, that she was alone, in the night, in the depths of the woods, she had then a still sharper goad to drive her on.

She dared not stop. She dared not rest. If

she stopped she would fall prey to every fear that lived in the woods and the dark. So she walked, and stumbled, and ran a little, and scrambled foot-bruised and knee-bruised, scratched as to face and torn as to dress, on, on, every hour after every hour through that whole night long.

It did not matter where she went, or whether she went anywhere. It was only that she must, for her very life, keep on going.

The woods had her in their grasp. Every swaying bush grabbed at her as she dodged by. Every black thicket before her held a terror. But these were as nothing to the fearful reaching arms of fright that clutched at her from behind as the dark closed in after her. She knew that she could see nothing, but she dared not even turn her head to look back over her shoulder for the things she knew she could not see. She could do nothing but stumble on and on, over stones and through bushes and over unseen fallen logs, dropping now and lying where she fell, until the fear of what was in the darkness behind her and the horror of things that seemed to crawl into her clothes from the ground roused her up and drove her onward.

In the dead, black hour before the dawning Betty lay down among the rocks on the highest part of the ridge between the watersheds of the Racquette and the Grasse. She did not fall. She merely slid from her feet to her hands and knees,

and then rolled out prone and half conscious on the stones.

In her ignorance of the resisting powers of youth and perfect health, she thought that she was dying. And she was dumbly willing. She did not care.

She had no record of the passing of time, or of whether she had slept, or had fainted, or had been awake. A sharp stone against which her shoulder was wedged began to hurt her unbearably. It had been pressing all the time under her shoulder blade. And she had not noticed it. Now, as is the way with pressure on a nerve, once she had located it, it became excruciating.

She put out her hand weakly, to turn over. Her outstretched fingers closed around what seemed to be a cool, smooth, round stick.

It writhed in her grasp and almost looped itself round her hand.

A Snake!!!

Betty rolled and scrambled to her feet and fled screaming down the divide.

It probably was as well that she had the open brush before her, where she could run away from her horror. If she could not have run away she would have gone crazy in her fright. The hand that had touched the snake in the dark hung limp and nerveless at her side as she ran, not because it had been bitten or hurt at all, for it had not,

but paralyzed by the crawling terror of the touch.

While she had lain unknowing on the stones, a little cold, dreary light had come over the world, and now as she ran screaming down a ragged slope of hill, she saw a man rise, giantlike and menacing in the dim light.

Betty saw a big pair of shoulders and a good-looking face, even though it was a dirty and a sleepy face, and Betty jumped from her stride, *straight into George G.'s arms!*

Afterwards, it developed that George G. had followed Betty through the woods until he had begun to fear that by following her directly he would only drive her on to run until she had exhausted and probably hurt herself. So George G., faithful and for once wise in his patience, had plodded on through the whole night paralleling Betty's flight as well as he could guess out her course, feeling that she would surely need him.

He had passed her and lost track of her while she lay on the stones at the top of the divide. But he had heard her crying coming down the hill, and he knew that she wanted him now.

"H-Hold me tight! Hold me!" sobbed Betty. "I'll never, never try to run away from you again!"

"There, there, Betty, dear! It was all my fault. It was all my fault. I'll never try to bully you again."

"I wasn't crying because I was lost and frightened. I was crying because I wanted you!"

"My sweetheart! My sweetheart!" said George G., bundling Betty up more comfortably in his arms and walking off with her. "I hope I'll never make you cry again as long as we live."

He carried her to where he had thrown down the basket and the blanket roll when he heard her cry. There he let her down on his knee, gathered up the basket and blanket and Betty again, and started off toting the whole collection. Betty sank into a dead sleep, her head lying across his shoulder.

When he had walked a little while without any particular direction or purpose, George G. saw that Betty was blue from cold and exhaustion, and he was afraid that she had fainted rather than fallen asleep. He looked at her torn wet shoes, and he knew that he was doing her no good carrying her this way. He must stop and make a fire and wrap her up warm until the heat of the sun should come.

He set Betty down against the first tree he came to, wrapped her up in his coat and blanket, and made a fire. Then he knelt at her feet to take off her shoes which were soaked from dew and puddles.

The morning sun poked a red eye over the divide just in time to see George G. kneeling be-

side his fire and stealthily stooping over to kiss the battered toe of Betty's shoe before attempting to take it off.

He removed the shoes and wrapped Betty tightly like a papoose, and rubbed her arms until he saw that she was indeed sleeping warm and sound as a baby. Satisfied, he settled back against the tree, holding Betty to the fire.

Heavy of head, but light of heart and unsleeping, George G. sat quiet until the fire burned out and the sun came down strong and hot. And still he did not move, except that every little while he leaned over hungrily and kissed the topmost of Betty's brown curls.

He was happy; happy as he had never known how to be. But he was even more determined than he had been last night that Betty must no longer go tramping through the countryside with him. He would not now, however, insist on getting married. Betty could have her own way about that.

Somehow, he must get her back home. If necessary, he would go back with her. In any case, she must go home at once—and it need not be known that she had come with him at all.

If he had dared, he would have left her here sleeping while he went to find the nearest house and bargain for some kind of a horse and rig to send her back home. But he did not dare leave her. The memory of his night-long chase, when

he thought that he had lost her and that she would run herself to death in the dark, was still upon him and he could not leave her unless in safe hands.

As he looked down the long slope that lay below them he saw a big and shining motor car picking its way mincingly along a sort of half road that ran up beside a brook. "Probably that was once a logging road," speculated George G., "but there are no loggers left now to use it, and it surely must be some nut that's driving a motor car up through there."

The "nut," as though he felt the force of George G.'s unspoken criticism, stopped the car, got out, looked the brook over, took a fishing rod and basket from the car, turned the car off the road and blocked it against all possibilities, and then started fishing up the brook.

George G. took instant decision. He got up, gentle as a cat, and started carrying Betty down to that car. You would not have believed that George G. could do it, because he was a heavy heeled fellow generally, and his feet were more used to an office floor than to the rough going of the upland underbrush.

Nevertheless, he did it.

For when George G. opened the door of the tonneau of the car and stepped up into it, he was carrying Betty, who was still sleeping comfortably.

Bundled up as she was, she fitted nicely on the length of the big seat. And George G., whose heart was now beating the drums of good luck and happiness, stole a kiss without shame, and then hustled off up the brook after the owner of the car.

He had half a notion that he knew the man whom he had seen start fishing up the brook. There was certainly something familiar about the fellow's walk, and the way he wore a cap. You see, George G. had always been the big man in a little town. He thought he knew everybody, or, what was the same thing, that everybody knew him.

But no one could have been more surprised than George G. himself at the turn of the event. When George G. came up to him the stranger was standing on a rock in the middle of the brook, splashed by the tumbling waters, and trolling religiously for pickerel.

"Oh, say!" yelled George G., "I want to see you!"

"Well, what's the matter with your eyes? You lop-eared blunderbuss, banging around here and yelling and scaring the fish all out of the brook!"

"But, I mean it," insisted George G., keeping his temper admirably; "I've really got to talk to you. It's tremendously important!"

"Well, you big fat mullet head, are you any better than I am? You can come out here and

tell it to me. Duck your feet in and get them wet just as I did. It's good for you. It'll cool your head."

George G. would have liked nothing better than to wade right into the brook. He was mad enough to go in and drag the fellow out through the water by the scruff of the neck. But he could not forget that he wanted that automobile for Betty. And under everything, he still had a lurking suspicion that he knew this man, if he could only place him. So he choked down his wrath, and pleaded:

"Now, if you'll just listen a minute. There's a young lady in your automobile who is nearly dead from exhaustion. She's been lost in the woods, and I——"

"What! George G., *you!* And a young lady in the woods! Say, if anybody told me this about you, I'd call him a——!"

"Oh, *Hell!*" yelled George G., in great enlightenment. "I *knew* it was you, Billy White, all the time," he lied, and almost convinced himself, "only I couldn't think of your confounded name!"

"You lie!" jeered Billy White. "If I hadn't grinned at your woe-begone face, I could have kept on kidding you till sundown!"

"Billy," said George G., "it's no kidding matter. I'm in trouble. Money trouble—and everything else."

Billy White came wading ashore without a word, mechanically reeling up his line as he came. He had seen George G. only a few times since they had been at college together at Colgate. But when George G. said "money trouble," Billy White knew that he was in the presence of calamity. He had not believed that anything in the world could happen to worry George G. on that score.

George G. drew him up the bank by the hand and told him everything—his robbery, the run on his bank, his arrest, and his flight with Betty—everything, that is, except the pregnant and fateful beginning of it all and the works of Satan.

"Well, then," said Billy White practically, "all you really need is a little ready money. Go back, and go straight to the county jail. Stay there, and let them whistle up the wind. I'll go to Albany myself and see that there's nothing funny about the report of those inspectors they sent up on you. You'll never come to trial on bunk like that. You say you're still solvent, after losing all that money?"

"Absolutely!"

"That's all I want to know. I can raise money for everybody else. I guess I can find some for you!"

Billy White was a promoter. A dealer in futures, character, city growth, and the opportunities of the United States of America. He had

already made two fortunes in Syracuse real estate and lost one. He expected to make and lose several others. All he asked was to be allowed to win oftener than he lost. What was a tragedy to George G. was a joke to Billy White.

"Nothing to it at all!" said Billy. "All you have to do is to walk right back to Canton jail and sit down and take it cool. Take it cool!" He was a little man with a curly head, partly bald, a bold eye, and an uncorked readiness for a fight. He himself had never taken anything coolly in his life.

"But," George G. objected, "it's Betty I'm thinking about."

"Betty?" Billy White seemed to have forgotten that there was a girl lost in the woods in the beginning.

"Of course!" said George G. "She's my girl. We were to have been married some time ago. *Now,* I've been the confounded idiot to let her come away like this with me. And now people will know that she ran away with me, and if we're not married, and can't prove that we were married, right off; why, don't you see? Some day people are going to talk. It'll be easy enough for *me* to tell 'em to mind their own business. But they'll hurt Betty. Don't you see it, Billy? They'll hurt Betty!"

"Hu-u-um," said Billy White, bobbing his curly head seriously. "You'll just have to come

to my shack. My wife's there. We'll ask her."

"Do you suppose she'll know what to do?"

"My wife?" said Billy White loudly. "My wife knows everything!"

When they came back to the car Betty was still sleeping, and Billy White gave George G. another blanket with which to wrap her more securely in the seat. Then Billy White stealthily started the car for his "shack," the two men talking in guilty whispers. It did not seem to occur to them that the jolting of the car must disturb Betty more than any shouting would have done.

Betty came climbing back to consciousness out of a happy sleep that seemed to have been oceans deep. She remembered nothing out of the sleep. She had not dreamt at all. But somehow she had been happy. And a lazy, glad-looking world of fleecy white clouds and nodding trees was drifting by her as she opened her sleepy eyes and looked out upon it.

She had fallen asleep to the jolting of George G.'s step as he carried her. She was still being carried, she felt; but George G. must be taking very long steps, or something.

She turned her head a little, and there was George G. sitting up in a seat in front of her. And there was another man sitting up there with him, and they were talking, thick as thieves.

Betty was wide awake instantly. How could George G. have found an automobile in the middle

of the woods! And who was this man with whom he was talking? It was evidently an old friend.

She felt that she had every right to listen to their conversation, for she was sure that it would be about her. And, whether she had the right or not, she was going to know what they were saying.

She wriggled out of her blankets and crouched up against the front seat.

"There's always a bishop or so around the lake somewhere. We'll give you a wedding that'll knock the eye out of the old County!" Billy White was boasting. "Leave it to my wife. She can do *anything!* You'll be married before night, if she sets her mind to it. But we'll keep it from the newspapers until Monday morning. And Monday morning early you'll arrive home ready to go to jail. Every paper from here to Syracuse, and all the New York papers that morning, will have a spread about your wedding. You can have it that you were married yesterday if you like.

"Oh, you leave it to my wife!" He seemed to regard all these things as already executed. "She can take plain, ordinary twelve o'clock and some old lace, and make it High Noon and Episcopal Benediction! Just you leave it to my wife!"

"Sounds good to me," said George G., "but, I don't know, I don't know what Betty will say."

"Only trouble I see," said Billy White, "is about a license. You know, you can't get mar-

ried without a license. And if we have to go to the Town Clerk here for a license we'll have to give your right name. And if they're looking for you—well, you see, it might make it bad. But we'll——"

"Billy," said George G. solemnly, "I'm the dangdest fool that ever was!"

"Um-m," said Billy White non-committally.

"I bullied Betty," George G. went on, "like a brute last night to make her marry me right away. And I suppose all the time the poor little kid knew that I couldn't go anywhere to get a license, and she didn't want to tell me so for fear of hurting my feelings. That's why she ran away from me! She didn't want to remind me that I was a hunted man, and didn't dare show my face or tell my name! I *knew* I'd be sorry for bullying her!"

Betty did not hear what Billy White answered. She was busy with something else.

The next minute Billy felt something—a paper it seemed—being shoved into his outside pocket, on the side away from George G.

Billy White had a live mind. He knew that *George G.* wasn't pushing that paper into his pocket. And he guessed that it wasn't intended for George G.'s eyes. He did not look around. He did not make a grab for his pocket. He sat tight, with both hands on the driving wheel until he came to a fairly decent piece of road. Then he stuck his hand into that outside pocket, just

casually, and pulled out the paper. He twiddled it open with his fingers and took a quiet look at it.

It was a marriage license for George G. Riceweather and Elizabeth Saunders, signed, sealed and delivered by Heman Allen, Town Clerk of the Town of Yaleville.

Now, we know in what capacity Betty visited Mr. Heman Allen the other evening.

Billy White stuffed the paper back into his pocket. He prudently put his hand back on the driving wheel, looked straight ahead at the road, and burst out into a loud, explosive roar of laughing.

"What're you laughing at?" growled George G. "You'll wake Betty up!"

Billy collapsed helpless over the wheel.

George G. looked around anxiously toward Betty. To his complete amazement, she was sitting erect in the seat, composed, tidy and cool as though she were being driven out in her own car.

Probably she took pity on George G., seeing the look of helpless bewilderment on his face. Or maybe she didn't like to hear Billy White laughing at him. Anyway, she sprang quickly forward, caught George G. by the shoulders, and kissed him.

It was a sort of hit-or-miss kiss. It fell approximately on the corner of George G.'s left eye. And Betty was back in her seat before Billy White

could notice anything. But to George G. it was a kiss such as men live and die for.

From that moment on, George G. was without control of his own movements. He was in the hands of his friends. And it was well that they were friends.

Billy White's "shack" turned out to be a beamed and tiled palace of twenty-five or thirty rooms, standing on a beautiful half wooded knoll above the northern rim of Cranberry lake.

By the time they were rolling smoothly up an encircling crushed stone drive to the house, George G. had recovered sense enough to introduce Miss Saunders and Mr. Billy White.

Billy White repeated the name as though he had heard it before, but that was all. His was a quick mind with a good snappy spring in it. But his business trained him to keep his weight on that spring at all times.

Betty quaked at the sight of the house and grounds. She knew that there was good taste here, and wealth. And she feared Billy White's paragon of a wife. But she went forward without shrinking, like a gambler who throws everything on one turn of fate.

She knew that she looked like a tramp. And the account which she would have to give of herself was enough to make any strange woman lift her eyebrows, in question.

She knew that she was going to meet terrifying odds. But, on the other side, she knew, too, that if she once passed this crucial initiation, with everything in the world against her except her face and her innocence, then she would never have any other social test to fear in all her life.

So, like a gambler, she set herself to throw her die and stand by it.

The motor slid to a cushioned stop at the foot of a broad flight of steps leading up to a spacious veranda that swept entirely around the house.

Billy White jumped out and helped Betty down from the car with a grave deference for which she could have hugged him.

And George G. was not behind hand. When Billy White tucked her hand under his arm and started to lead her triumphantly up the steps, George G. was at her other elbow and went up step for step. Betty had steeled herself well for an ordeal. But this double support was as warming wine to her heart as she faced the imposing, questioning portals of the door before her.

Out through the door there swept, or floated, a magnificent, exquisite, creamy white, imperious young woman, who viewed the ascending trio with a tolerant, if mildly horrified, air.

If you were there and had seen that look from the regal young lady—and you were a quick and disinterested observer—you would have

read that look to mean that Billy White was in the habit of bringing home queer fish from his sport.

Betty came into full view on the level of the veranda.

The two young women looked full at each other for a lightning instant.

Then the regal creamy young woman sprang from the door across the porch and caught Betty full in her arms, crying:

BETTY ON A BET!!!

And Betty screamed:

ANGELA O'TOOLE!!!

The two stood rocking and laughing hysterically in each other's arms. Then Betty's head crept to the other's bosom, and she began to cry.

George G., pop-eyed and heavy in labor with an idea, delivered himself loudly. He said:

"Angela O'Toole is a calf!"

Billy White's wife, the large queenly, cream and white young woman, who might have been a year or two older than Betty, took her tight in her arms and fairly carried her away through the door, and out of sight.

Billy White took George G. by the arm soothingly after the manner of a day now gone, when a good man had suddenly noticed that another good man had taken a drink too many. He led him toward the corner of the veranda, saying comfortingly:

"I half suspected, you know, George G., that she was "Betty on a Bet." But I wasn't sure. It seems they were sworn brothers at school at Villa Marie. They fought the cops. They rang the bells at unholy hours. They made themselves sick with outrageous midnight feeds. They haven't seen——"

But George G. was not to be diverted. As he was being gently armed into Billy White's den off the corner of the veranda, he was still mumbling defiantly:

"Angela O'Toole is a ca——"

XIII

"I KNOW your money will come back, somehow. I just *know* it," said Betty.

"Betty," said George G., pressing her hand, "I wont say I don't want it back. That'd be a lie. But, I'll say this: I can get along without it. I haven't cheated any man a dollar. I don't owe any man a dollar that can't be paid with a hundred cents. And, Betty," his voice suddenly boomed out stout and full in the night, "so long as I've got you, I can *make* all the money I want. When this thing is cleared, I can start right out again and make a fortune for you."

"I don't want it dear, you know that. But just the same, I think your own money is coming back to you."

"I don't see much hope of that now, Betty, I'm afraid it's gone for good. But while we have each other we can forget it." He tightened his arm, in the half circle of which Betty was comfortably braced; and they rode along in a happy silence, looking for the dawn.

Billy White's wife had been as good as his word. She had furnished a wedding party, a

bishop, and a cake. And she had made high noon out of three o'clock in the afternoon.

Betty was married within three hours of the time when she went up the steps to meet Angela O'Toole. Of course, George G. was there and answered loudly, and he was married too. But that was all *he* amounted to.

Then Billy White and Angela slipped away with the last of their hastily gathered guests. And George G. and Betty found themselves in a strange new world of wonderful intimacy and shyness, alone in the big house but for two old servants.

That was Saturday afternoon.

Now they were being driven back to Yaleville by Billy White's chauffeur through the velvety summer night, to face the facts of Monday morning.

They tried to be sober and grave, and to prepare for the situation with some kind of dignity. For George G. had determined to go right to Canton and give himself up to the Sheriff, for incarceration in the county jail. While Betty knew that she must stay in Yaleville and face a nine days' wonder—if indeed she were not herself to be arrested for helping George to escape.

They both resented having to hurry back in this way. But Billy White had arranged that their wedding should be featured in every newspaper that was published Monday morning. And

George G. felt that it would look like impudence and contempt of the law to try to remain at liberty for any time after that publication.

Altogether they should have been going back crestfallen and serious enough. But they were nothing of the kind. Betty was tingling with a rising excitement in which she was sure that some wonderful thing was going to happen that would sweep away the whole ugly cloud that threatened them. George G., for his part, felt that Betty was his, and the rest of the world could go hang.

And they both felt like two lively children who, having had the most unheard of lark, were still reveling in the joy of it, to the exclusion of all other thought.

They came back over the poplar plain and the old sand road to Betty's home, just as the first gray streaks of dawn were falling across the river mists. George G. left Betty under the two pines by the hammock, to explain herself as best she could to Miss Susan Wilbur. Poor Betty had no idea of the terror that her appearance in the cold, dim dawn would bring. And she insisted on facing Miss Susan alone.

George G. rode across the bridge and up to his bank door. There was not a stir of any sort in the village. It would be an hour yet before the early rattle of the milk wagons going to the butter factory would begin. He asked the chauffeur to wait.

He knew that it was quite possible that there was an officer in the bank ready to arrest him. But he wanted to get into the bank just for a look around. And he wanted, if possible, to drive to Canton and go to jail on his own volition.

The lock on the door was unchanged. His key opened the bank as on any morning in the past, and when he went in he was surprised to find that there was apparently no one in the bank. He had expected that one of the inspectors or, at least, the Deputy Sheriff would sleep there. Of course one of them might have been asleep in George G.'s bedroom. He did not think of that.

Everything was the same in the bank, except that there was already visible a gathering coating of dust over the place that gave George G. a shiver of desolateness. He walked in through to the private office.

The first thing he noticed there was that somebody had been making a reading and smoking den out of the office. The air was leathery with stale smoke, and the floor was littered with ashes and newspapers. The next thing he noticed—the light was coming in quite strong now through the big front window—was last Friday's copy of Satan's newspaper, *The Yaleville Democrat.*

It was spread out on George G.'s desk. His first thought as he recognized the paper was:

"I wonder how Satan's novel came out!"

But when his eyes came down to the reading

matter of the paper, those same eyes began to pop in his head. Satan had swept away all the sacred, time-honored features of his paper's front page, and the entire page was headed heavily with the lines:

TRAGEDY IN OUR MIDST!

FATAL DOUBLE ACCIDENT FOLLOWS ESCAPE FROM JAIL

George G. Riceweather and Miss B. Saunders Die in River.

George G. was wearing a cap which belonged to Billy White. He removed the cap, and stood looking down at the paper, with bared head.

He was shocked, profoundly shocked. Although he had at first an underlying feeling that this was more of Satan's tomfoolery—and very bad taste at that!—yet, such is the hypnotizing power of the printed word, when he had carried the paper to the window and had read down into the details he began to be visibly and immeasurably saddened.

"My Lord!" he said, half way down the first column.

"Terrible!" he groaned. Through Satan's depiction he envisaged Betty and himself taking the horrible plunge down the hill and into the black water.

At no time did there appear to George G. any-

thing funny in the situation of reading about his own death. By no means! It was a most moving and terrible thought.

Not for one moment did George G. believe the thing. He knew that he was not dead. But it was most horrible. Horrible!

George G. took the paper with him and walked gravely up to his room, and began to change his clothes at once.

It seemed to George G. that a terrible retribution had swiftly followed his breaking jail. This awful thing had followed his own rash act, like the peal following the flash. And think of the demoralizing effect it must have on the whole community! The shock and the pain it must cause the older people! Think of the bad effect and the bad example for the young of both sexes!

This was awful!

George G. stripped down to his underclothing and shoes. He threw away the borrowed finery of Billy White, as though it had some share in the blame of the terrible thing which he had just read from the newspaper.

Standing in his balbriggans, George G. resolved that he would go to the county jail in a spirit of dignity and expiation. This tragedy in the newspaper had taught him that there were some things in this world that were not to be tampered with.

He felt that the decencies demanded that he go to jail in somber and respectable mien. He did

not intend going in mourning, exactly; but he must show that he respected the feelings of the public.

He would wear his tuxedo and his gray checked pants. No. He would not wear the gray pants. They were not gaudy, it was true; but they had something festive about them that did not fit this occasion. He would wear the original black pants that came with the tuxedo—and his tall hat, of course.

Certainly, he had never intended to wear that hat to jail. But there was tragedy about this occasion that brooked no half measures.

The black pants were in his clothes closet, on a shelf lower down than the one on which reposed his silk hat.

George G. reached up into the closet and tipped the high hat on to his head. Then he took the pants from the lower shelf and stepped out into the room to put them on.

There was something in the hat! George G. could feel it! His hair rose on his head. The skin crinkled down his back, for he felt sure that a rat had nested in his hat!

He grabbed the hat off his head and gave it a swish at arm's length away from him around the room.

Instead of the supposititious female rat and her young family, there came swishing out of the

hat a slew of crackling yellow money, in thin packs!

George G. dropped the hat and half squatted, his hands on his knees, after the manner of some baseball players, peering down at the packs of money.

He shifted craftily on his feet until he was within striking distance of where the money lay, most of it in one pile on the floor. He made a sudden swoop at it and came up with the money clutched in his hands.

He knew that money! He would have known it at sight, if it had been the last light ever to come to his eyes.

It was his RESERVE! His sacred Reserve! His sixty-five thousand dollars, the loss of which had closed his bank and sent him on his way to prison!

It was easy to know that money. There was no other money like it! Never in all the world had there ever been money so beautiful!

George G. gathered up the money and put it back in the hat and put the hat back on the shelf.

He did not dance, or try to sing, or shout, or do any of the things that he wanted to do.

He stood looking up at the hat.

"Thank God!" said George G., still in his balbriggans.

He was strongly reminded of things in the

scriptures, of people whom he had heard a
church, who having found the precious thi
had been lost, went forthwith and made a
and killed a fat calf, and called in their
and neighbors to tell them about it.

He thought he ought to run out and ri
Methodist church bell and rouse the villag
hustled into the black pants, but they were n
the symbol of solemnity or expiation. The
just pants, to cover his legs. For George
not now going to jail.

Not he!

But first, he wanted to tell Betty. For
G. had learned that there was one greater
than money. And that was to see Betty'
light up with a happy surprise that he had
her. He had not, it was true, had very
practice with this yet. But he hoped to have

Would Betty believe him? George G
toned down his suspenders and looked his qu
mutely up at the hat. Would she believe t
had been such a dub as to dream all that s
a nightmare, about going down into the vau
fighting two robbers, and then, after he wo
going out to chase them all night in his car.
all the time he had just gone down in his
and taken the money out of the vault and c
it up and put it in the hat! Now he remem
that when he woke up on his bedroom floor,
the bump on his head, and the rain driving

seemed to have been coming from the direction of this inside room. Would Betty believe that he had been such a fool as to bring all this upon himself.

Yes, he concluded, Betty would believe him. Betty loved him. And besides, he strongly suspected that Betty did not think he was any too bright, anyway.

But, would anybody else believe him?

No, he admitted. Nobody else would believe him.

Could he give it out to the world that he had dreamt the whole confounded business, while he had the money in his hat all the time!

Why! They'd swear he was a crook, and was just trying to get away with it, and got caught at it!

"One way, I'm a crook," said he, summing up. "And the other way I'm an unbelievable boob! And maybe a little of both!

"It won't do!" he declared. "I'd rather go to jail than give out such a thing!

"But, what good would it do to go to jail? Even in jail, I'd still be either a fool or a crook!

"Confound Satan, anyway! *He* started the whole fracas! It was his Jimdam nonsense that had me all unnerved at the time!

"I'll call him and tell him the truth. I've *got* to tell *somebody!*"

On the spur of the thought, he ran out through his bedroom and down into the bank.

It took a little time to stir up the sleepy "central," and a little more time to wake up the sleeping Satan in the parsonage. But in a few minutes George G. was shouting into the telephone:

"Come right over here to the bank, Satan! There's not a minute to lose! You showed you were my friend the other day, and you're the only man in the town that's got any brains. Come over here. And come ahopping!"

In a surprisingly short time Satan came stepping nimbly along the sidewalk and was admitted to the bank by George G. in feverish haste.

George G. grabbed him by the arm and escorted him forcibly up the stairs and through his bedroom and into his spare dressing room, without a word.

He stood him in the middle of the room and pointed dramatically at the open closet.

"Satan, do you see that hat?"

It was almost full daylight outside, but the closet was still dark. Satan squinted, however; and admitted that he saw the hat.

"In that hat," said George G. heavily, "there's sixty-five thousand dollars! Do you hear? My *Reserve!* My fortune, that I thought had been stolen! Sixty-five——!"

But George G. could not wait for words. He grabbed the hat down from the shelf and shook

it under Satan's astonished nose. He stuck his hand into the hat and pulled out a fistful of packs of bills and wig-wagged them before Satan's eyes so that Satan could see just what they were.

"Sixty-five thousand, nearly, Satan, that I thought I was robbed of!

"I wasn't robbed at all! But I thought I was! I had a nightmare, that night of the storm. And say!" he appealed to Satan to believe him, "on my dying oath I believed that I fought those robbers and that they got away from me with the money!

"But what happened was this. I must have gone down there in my sleep and carried the money up here and put it in the hat. I remember now that I said to myself, when I was down there early in the evening: 'You could put it all in a hat!'

"And I did put it in the hat!"

George G. put the hat and the money back into the closet. Then he turned on Satan with a quick and searching eye.

"Satan, do you believe me?"

"I do, George G.," said Satan stoutly.

"Will anybody else believe me?"

"Well-l—" said Satan slowly. And his face puckered up all into fine little wrinkles, as though he had just tasted a very sour apple.

"They wont," said George G. promptly. "And I know it. Some'll say that I tried to embezzle the money and just couldn't get away with it.

And the rest'll say I'm a plain fool and don't know what I'm doing. And some'll say both. And none of them will ever trust me again!

"I've got to find some way out of this before anybody gets up. If I don't I'm done for!

"And you're the man that's got to think of some way out. Think of something, Satan. *You've got to!* You started the whole thing anyway!"

"Started nothing!" retorted Satan. "You went down the back stairs like a——!"

"For God's sake, Satan, don't rake up the past!" appealed George G. tearfully. "Think of something!"

Satan magnanimously thought.

"Where've you been?" he inquired hopefully after a moment. "Can't you say that you got out of jail to hunt the robbers, and that you followed them foot by foot till you caught them and took your money away from them. And there you are! Why! It's a story all ready made, right to your hand! Wait!"

Satan dug his hands into various pockets and fished out a wad of printed, but unused, handbills and a pencil.

"Now, just start me off," coached Satan. "Just tell me where you went and I'll write a corking story for you, and you can tell it word for word."

George G. eyed Satan and the writing tools of his trade.

"No, you don't, Satan! Not by a jugfull!! You started the whole dang contraption with your writing a novel! And then you wrote me out for the movies, by the way. And then you drowned me in the river! No! I don't want anything to do with you when you start writing! You're *dangerous!*

"You *know* I couldn't lie worth a hoot," he went on conciliatingly, "not if you drew a picture of it for me. And besides, Betty and I have been away getting married all the time; the Syracuse and Watertown papers'll be here at eight o'clock with a page full of it. Everybody would know that I couldn't be getting married and chasing robbers at the same time!" said George G. with great acumen.

"*That* complicates it," said Satan gravely. "It always does.

"We've got to leave you out," he admitted after a hard-thinking pause. "You'll just have to tell that you ran away to get married. That'll raise some pity for you," he concluded bitingly.

"But somebody else besides you," he began again, "has got to find the money. *You* won't do."

"Money? Find what money?" queried George G. dully.

"Why, the sixty-five thousand. The reserve. Your money."

"Find it! *I* found it," declared George G., "and it's going to stay found!"

"Yes, but how the deuce could you find it while you were away being married? It's got to be lost, I tell you. And somebody's got to find it."

"Not by a dangsite! That money wont go outside my hearing for the next ten years! It's been lost and found once each, and I was the doctor in both cases. But, by the Jumping Jimminy! it'll never be lost again, or found either!"

"You don't understand," said Satan patiently. "You see the money must be found without you, in such a way that you cannot be connected with it since the minute it was stolen. Now I'm going to take it right now, right up to Barclay's grove; and I'm going to hide it. Then I'll start the whole walking population of Yaleville up there looking for it. They'll find it easily—but not easily enough to make it look like a fake—and you'll have it back here while you'd be scratching your ear."

"While I'd be scratching my ear!" yelled George G., hopping around Satan. "While I'd be wringing *your neck,* you mean! Say! In the name of *E. Pluribus Unum!*" yelled George G. loud enough to have waked the town if he had been in the open air. "Didn't you know what that stuff was that I showed you in the hat? That was Money! MONEY!!! Good Christopher! Do you think I'd trust this town up in Barclay's grove with it! Not by a dangsite!

"You can all go to the devil, and think what you like!"

"All right," said Satan smoothly. "Personally, I'm going home and finish my night's sleep."

George G. let him get as far as the head of the stairs outside the bedroom door before he weakened and called him back.

"Well, come back, Satan. I suppose we've got to rig up something. But, for the love of humanity! tell me just what you're going to pull off! I'm liable to murder somebody if I don't understand and get a notion that anything's gone wrong."

"You sit right down and listen to me for two minutes," said Satan coming back.

Satan sat down, but George G. would not. He continued walking around the room, keeping a truculent watch on Satan to prevent him from writing anything. George G. seemed to be willing to hear whatever Satan had to say. But he was determined that he must not let his imagination loose on paper.

In the end, what Satan said must have convinced George G., for he took the hat down, got some heavy paper from the bottom of the closet, and began wrapping the money into a package.

He did not do this without a protest. He was submitting to a brutal necessity. Although he was gradually convinced that Satan's plan was the only way to save some of his reputation for

common sense and honesty, yet he did not seem to thank Satan for the idea.

He was, he felt, being clubbed into the affair by the necessity of quick action before the village should awake. And once he told Satan that it was worse than being shanghaied. But he saw no course other than to go through with this, and he finally handed over the package to Satan.

"Always excepting Betty," said George G., as he reluctantly put the money in Satan's hands, "there's not another person on earth that I'd trust with his hands on this money. And, for Heaven's sake, Satan, be careful. You know, you don't value money very much."

"You needn't worry, George G.," said Satan grimly. "Inside of half an hour I'll have the whole town watching the money for you!"

They went down to the back door of the bank and Satan slipped the package under his coat and made off unobserved through the back yards.

George G. came through the bank to the front door, and told Billy White's chauffeur to drive over to the hotel and try to arouse somebody to get him something to eat.

"I want to send you back to Billy White," he said, "with a full stomach, and good news!"

He was pretending to himself that he was not worried, that he was sure Satan would take as good care of the money as he himself would. But it was a futile pretense. He was jumping with

nervousness, and it was only by the strongest effort that he was able to restrain himself from running after Satan.

He went up and washed, and while dressing he tore a necktie to shreds—a thing he had never before done in all his life.

He knew now that he should have made Satan give him some kind of signal, so that he could know how things were working out. As it was, Satan might have dropped dead by this time and he not be a bit the wiser of it. "And now, where would *I* be *then!*" fretted George G. over the possibility.

When he could find nothing further to fuss about in his bedroom, he went down into the bank and sat down at his desk near the big front window, in full view of the street.

It did not occur to him that it might shock the village to wake up and see a man who had been drowned and dead since Thursday night now sitting up in his office window. True, Satan had not seemed very greatly surprised at hearing his voice over the telephone. But then, Satan was never surprised at anything. So *that* did not count so much. The truth is that George G. had forgotten all about the drowning tragedy, and he was thinking of nothing but of getting his money back in his hands and defying old Sessions and the rest of those who had been instrumental in his arrest.

Milton Holland went by on his way down to

open the butter factory. He was still half asleep, and he passed George G.'s window without looking in.

Then Fred Wiltmore drove by in his sulky with a still lighted lantern hanging from his axle. Fred looked at George G.'s window and thought he saw somebody, or something, sitting there in George G.'s chair. Of course, Fred was not frightened, because he knew there was really nothing there in George G.'s chair. But it seems, from later accounts, that his horse became frightened just at that moment and went bolting down the street.

Then John Gibson came along. He looked in the window. He always looked into windows.

There was George G. sitting there, just as natural as life!

John Gibson was not thought of as a very brave old man. But it must be said for him that he did not run. Fascinated, he backed step by step across the broad sidewalk, always staring at George G., until he stood on the very edge of the walk. And as the old man was tetering on that precipice, George G. bounded up out of his chair —he just could not sit still any longer.

John Gibson fell off the sidewalk. He almost broke his hip in the fall, but he got up heroically and hobbled off down the street.

In his progress down the street he told the story three times. The first time, he said he had

seen George G.'s ghost in the window. He was laughed at, for it was almost sunrise, when anybody can laugh at ghost stories.

The second time, he said that George G.'s ghost had jumped and sworn at him. He could not remember exactly what the ghost had said. But, at least, he was not laughed at so much.

So the third time he told it, he said that George G. had come out and thrown him off the sidewalk. And everybody seemed satisfied.

However, John Gibson had made a stir.

Adelia Fairchild came gingerly up the street, on the far side. And, sure enough! there was George G. standing in the open doorway of the bank, dressed incongruously in black pants and his usual gray summer coat and vest.

Adelia was a professing Christian, of course. But she did sometimes dabble with the ouija board. She wanted to speak to George G., but her tongue and her lips were so dry that she could not open her mouth. She thought of her money that *was* in the bank, and she wished that she had the ouija board with her.

Then George G. shouted:

"Morning, 'Delia. How's things!"

Adelia backed up against a telegraph pole, gasping:

"Then, you ain't—not——?"

"Not even wet!" laughed George G. He was so nervous with anxiety about Satan that he

seemed to be in high spirits. "More of Jim Smith's lies!" he explained.

As soon as Adelia heard Jim Smith's name in the matter, she once more felt the earth solid under her feet—it had been jiggling and whirling about ever since she first saw George G. And, what was still more reassuring, she now felt a recurrence of her accustomed "pains." So she was sure that she was now seeing George G. in the flesh.

She drooped forlornly in her usual, resigned-to-the-worst manner across the street and half sat and half leaned on the edge of the high sidewalk.

"What—what about the money?" she faltered.

"Come right in, 'Delia," said George G. loudly, "and get the first place in the line! I'm going to open this bank at nine o'clock, in spite of all the inspectors from here to—to—! And there's plenty of money for everybody. But you can have yours the very first if you want it!"

In his excitement, George G. forgot that by talking like this he was likely to defeat the very object for which he had let Satan take the money away. But he did not care. He was getting so nervous that if something did not soon turn up, he would go out and bring the money back himself; and let people think what they liked.

Satan was hastily climbing the river bank behind the Constable's house and the jail. It was almost time for the Constable to be getting up,

and Satan had a message for the Constable which must be delivered before that gentleman awoke.

Satan came up past the jail and through the yard and stood right under the Constable's open window.

He took from his pocket a flat wrapped piece of paper and tossed it into the Constable's bedroom window. He heard it fall on the floor of the room, and then he slipped away through the fence and over into the yard back of Mr. Bartlett's hotel. From there, he made a detour and came out into the street, unobserved, some distance up.

The Constable awoke with something of a start. But he was getting used to being awakened by alarms these days, and he did not know just what noise had aroused him.

He got out of bed without waking his wife. And then he saw the paper lying on the floor. He picked it up and found that it contained nothing but a little flat stone. Then he saw that there was something written on the inside of the paper.

He took his clothes and the paper and went out into the hall. His wife slept on.

He struggled into his clothes with one hand, while he held the paper in the other and made out the words, written in a very bad, crooked hand, in pencil:

"You poor coot! You ain't no more a police officer than a turkey gobbler! The bank money

has been laying in Barclay's grove for five days. But you couldn't follow a trail if it was held to your nose!"

There was no superscription, but the Constable did not doubt that the message was intended for himself. And there was no signature. Yet, he believed that the information was true. It sounded brutal and insulting, just like truth.

He went softly down the stairs to where his shoes stood by the kitchen stove, put the shoes on, and without stopping for his coat went quietly out into the yard.

Adelia Fairchild did not accept George G.'s invitation to come into the bank and take her place first in line to get her money.

George G. looked real enough standing there in the doorway, but to Adelia's mind he was a little too recently back from the dead for entire comfort. He *looked* all right, but she had just a little creepy fear that if she went too near him, or touched him, he might feel cold and damp and clammy, like.

Adelia thought she would wait for company. She saw it coming.

John Gibson's tale had already aroused the lower part of the street. Johile Jenkins was in the middle of the road, heading up toward the bank. John Gibson was coming back with two other men.

Satan appeared at the other end of the street.

Johile was the first to come within speaking distance. He was a brave man, and he walked right up on the high sidewalk and right up to George G. and put out his hand. But it must be admitted that his good eye studied George G. warily, and that he could feel a cold streak running down his back.

"Glad to see you back, George G.!" he said heartily.

"Thank you, Johile. I *had* to go away. You see, Johile, Betty and I wanted to get married. And we just couldn't wait!" he laughed.

"I'm mighty glad to hear it!" boomed Johile. "Betty's the best girl this town ever raised. The man that has her can't say there's no brains in his family!

"But say! George G.," Johile pinioned him with his eye, "even with Betty's brains to help you— Honest to God! *how* did you get out from under that car in the river?"

"Ha! Ha!" laughed George G. He was almost hysterical now, for he saw Satan coming idling down the street, empty handed. "All nonsense!" he told Johile. "Jim Smith had you all seeing things! There wasn't any river or any car at all! We walked. Jim Smith must have just talked you all into seeing things!"

"Not by Hell's Horned Critter!" swore Johile violently. "I pulled the car out of the river *my ownself! I was there!"*

"Well, *I* wasn't," admitted George G., "so I don't know."

Johile glared. He suspected that George G. was kidding him. And, from a man not ten minutes returned from the dead, it wasn't decent!

Johile looked around to call witnesses.

John Gibson and his two followers were almost at hand. Petey Leonard, whose milk wagon was always first at the butter factory in the morning, came rattling across the bridge. But Satan arrived first. He hailed George G. as soon as possible, for he was afraid that the latter had already been talking and that he would spoil the whole plan.

"Well, you certainly gave us a *fine* fright!" he yelled at George G. in greeting.

"How could I get married in jail?" retorted George G., with astonishing cleverness. He wanted to kill Satan for not staying up near the place where he had put the money, so that he could watch it. But he did not dare say anything except what Satan had told him to say.

"The Constable's been acting queer since yesterday," remarked Satan irrelevantly. "I think he thinks he's got some clew to the robbers."

"Thinks!" snorted Johile loudly. "If Jed Stevens ever used his head for anything except to eat through, it'd fall apart!"

Petey Leonard stopped his wagon at the edge

of the high sidewalk, but he did not leave his seat. He looked George G. up and down, and then commented, with as near approval as Petey Leonard ever permitted himself:

"As healthy lookin' a corpse as I ever seen!"

Johile was looking down the street with his good eye.

"What's the darn fool think he's chasin' now?" he inquired.

The Constable, who must have skirted down the river bank from his own house, was now crossing the street some distance down.

He was hatless, coatless, and in evident haste.

He was followed closely, but discreetly, by Billy King. Where Billy King had come from or why he was following the Constable we do not know, except, of course, that he always kept his eye on the Constable, as a personal policy.

The Constable disappeared into the lots beyond Adelia's store. Johile and Adelia started down the street to see where he was going, and why.

Satan started after them. John Gibson and the two men with him did likewise.

There was a rattling of doors over at the American House and three men came out on the porch. Two of them were George G.'s enemies, the bank inspectors.

When George G. saw them he did not wait

even to shut his door. He started running after Satan. His bank was where his money was. And Satan alone knew where that was.

The Constable had just cleared the first field back of Adelia's store when he looked back and saw Billy King following him. He turned on Billy, as though to chase him back. But he saw the others, four or five others, coming.

He turned again and started running straight for Barclay's grove.

It looked like a man hunt, with the Constable running as if in fear of his life, and Billy King yelling behind him, and the fever of the chase running back like wildfire upon the others following.

Johile and Adelia Fairchild led the main body of the pursuers across the first field. But they both lost time, for differing reasons, at the first fence.

From there on, the race was to the strong and the fleet.

It was just about getting up time for most of the village, and it seemed that everybody just jumped out of bed and raced after the Constable. None of them knew why they were chasing the Constable. In fact, they were chasing him to find out. But one half of the village was running after him. So the other half did the same.

Over fences, and through people's yards, and across two growing cornfields, went the pursuit,

with the Constable still holding his lead, until he came to the open pasture in the middle of which stood Barclay's grove.

Here Mr. Stevens, with his goal immediately before him, put on such a burst of speed that he threatened to leave the pursuit hopelessly in the distance. He crossed the pasture, dashed madly into the grove, and was instantly lost from sight.

One of the bank inspectors and Willie Hope, that observant young man, both of whom had shown great speed in the chase, were the first to catch Billy King on the edge of the grove.

"Where did he go?" "Which way?"

"He's just duckin' round from one tree to another!" said Billy King disgustedly. Billy King had expected some excitement. "He's just gone nutty, that's all!"

They ran into the grove, followed by Nelse Ramsey and Jim Peters, by Satan and George G. and the other bank inspector, and, in loose mass, by the village of Yaleville.

The Constable was running from tree to tree, looking into the hollows of dead trunks, stooping down and sticking his arm into holes where the gnarled roots were raised out of the ground, and giving every appearance of a man possessed of lively hallucinations.

"It's here!" he yelled, when he saw that he was being surrounded.

"I had them two desperadoes cornered here

last night! An' they got away from me in the dark! But I know they hid the money here! I almost had 'em! They couldn't git away from here with it!"

Satan looked at George G., as much as to say: "I knew my man. I knew he'd never tell about that note."

But George G. cared little about that. George G. wanted to know where the money was. And he wanted to get his hands on it. And he began to do just what the Constable was doing, running from tree to tree, and kicking and poking under every rotting stump.

The example was so good that instantly, almost before they understood the matter, the whole crowd fell to work, searching, combing the entire grove as though they would tear it up by the roots. They were hunting buried treasure, robbers' gold, and, even though they knew that they would get none of it themselves, it was most fascinating and exciting.

Satan edged over away from the crowd toward an old beech and stood looking up into its branches, his hands in his pockets. He seemed to take no interest in what was going on. But that was just like Satan. Nobody ever paid any attention to him.

Billy King came over to look up into the tree with Satan, for he was disappointed with the turn of affairs. There wasn't going to be any fight, or anything, practically!

He could not see anything for Satan to look at up in the tree, so he was disappointed again. But there was certainly a good sized hole under the roots of the old beech, and, just for something to do, he went over and poked a stick into the hole.

Instantly he was down on his face, digging himself in with his hand, right in under the tree. And Satan put up a yell that set the grove ringing.

Everybody came running. The Constable tore in first, and dragged Billy King out of the hole with a small paper bundle wrapped in his arms.

The Constable cuffed Billy King and shook him, trying to get the package from him, and yelling:

"You ding Brat! Think you're goin' to git some o' my reward! Well, you ain't! I tracked them robbers right here to this spot, an' they ain't nobody goin' to git none o' my honest reward!"

He kept on cuffing and tugging at Billy, but the boy held on.

George G. interfered:

"You needn't worry, Constable. If that's my money, you won't lose anything. Give it to me, Billy."

George G. took the package and opened it then and there, and riffled out the beautiful yellow bills to the shining eyes of his friends and neighbors.

"There it is, friends, sixty-five thousand dollars —just as I told you!

"Now my bank is open the minute we get back there," he shouted defiantly, for the benefit of the

two bank inspectors. "And anybody that wants his money out can have it and welcome. Come one, come all!" he yelled. "I'm ready for 'em now!"

And he slapped the package up against his chest and started leading a triumphant procession back to the bank.

It was a veritable march of victory, joined in gladly by those who had feared that their money was lost with George G.'s demise, and by those who had never had any money in the bank, and even by those who had just pretended that they had money in the bank.

George G. marched gaily to the door of his bank, and there was his cashier standing mournfully at the door.

"Get in there, Norman, and open up for business. And for God's sake look glad, for once in your life!" shouted George G. genially.

But he did not hand the money to Farnsworth. He carried it himself in through to the cage and went down into the vault and put it on the top tier of the safe with his own hands.

Then he went back into his office and sat down. He had caught a glimpse of Betty in the crowd outside the bank. And he knew that she would probably come in right away.

He had to tell her the truth. He had to make his confession to her. And, Oh Lord! what a fool she would think him!

All this whole terrible business over a silly nightmare! He would simply have to tell her that she had married a fool. That was all. But he *had* to tell.

"I mustn't start out lying to her," said he downrightly. "I've *got* to tell her!"

And then Betty came in. She shut the door behind her and ran and jumped right into George G.'s arms, laughing and crying:

"Oh! I'm so glad, so glad! After all you've been through!"

George G. held her close for a moment, and then he knew that he must, now or never, unburden his conscience.

"I've got to tell you something, Betty," he began. "I'm ashamed to tell you, but I've got to. Well, you might as well know it now; I suppose you'd have to know it some time."

"What is it, dear?" said Betty bravely. "Tell me. I can stand it now."

"You've got to hear the truth, Betty. And the truth is this: *I'm a fool.* I——"

"Oh," said Betty, in happy relief, "is *that* all! Why, I always knew——"

Betty stopped short there.

And then she kissed him.

Did George G. tell?

No!!!

On the march back to the bank Jim Smith had walked with the Constable. During the three

days since the tragedy in the river Jim Smith had been most strangely silent and uncommunicative. But it was not in the nature of things that he should long remain so. And now, having heard at first hand the Constable's story of his almost successful pursuit of the robbers, Jim Smith was now editing and publishing the story.

"Ku . . . ku . . . ku . . . *Constable* ain't been to bed for three nights," said Jim Smith to a group in the middle of the street in front of the bank.

"Chu . . . chu . . . chick . . . chu . . . *chased* 'em from Madrid to Morley and back here, all in one night, on foot!

"Sh . . . sh . . . *Sheriff's* goin' to make him a Special Deputy before night!"

Satan edged gently through the crowd and touched Jim Smith's arm. He led him quietly over toward the river bank, where they were practically out of earshot.

"Jim," said Satan, "on the level, I'd like to hear your private opinion of the whole business. I'll give you two dollars for it. What did you think of the whole performance?"

Jim Smith looked Satan delightedly in the eye, and he began to say:

"It . . . it . . . it . . . it . . . *it's* a ku . . . ku . . . ku . . . *Cuckoo!*"

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